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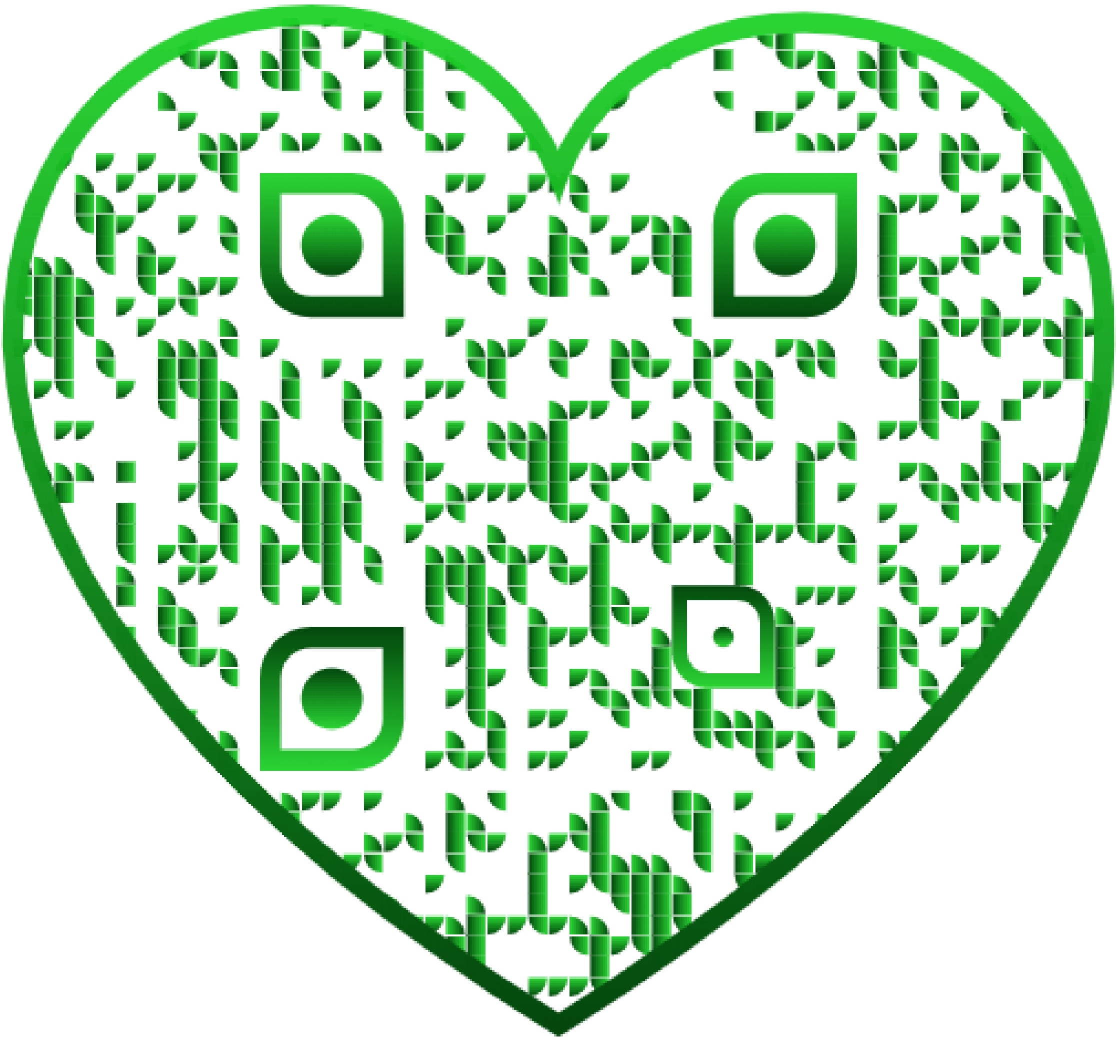

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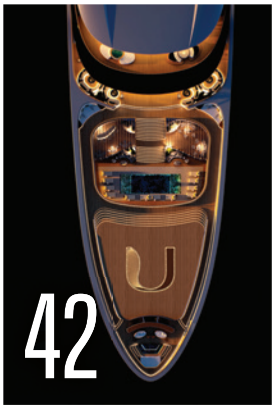

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A new way to lift the spirits

COVER IMAGE **DISNEY (ARTIST CONCEPT ONLY)**
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◆ Editor's Letter

THERE'S A RATHER POPULAR QUOTE that says, "The cure for anything is salt water: sweat, tears, or the sea." Unless you've been at sea for a while (whether literally or metaphorically), you've probably seen it floating around your Instagram feed - so it is a bit of a shame that the person who wrote it isn't often credited. Apparently, it belongs to an author called Karen Blixen - a Danish baroness who wrote under the pen name Isak Dinesen. But the reason why it's so widely shared is because the calming power of water is something that many people across the world can relate to.

From the gentle lapping of waves upon a sandy shore, to the fresh and salty scent of the sea, water has the ability to soothe us deeply. It's not just because of its sensorial benefits, either - though studies have found that it can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, and heal with its "pink noise". From swimming and sailing to surfing, water-based activities can offer us bursts of dopamine, and its colour is soothing to the brain. Spending a little time immersed in water can help us sleep better at night, offering a sense of weightlessness in more ways than one. Is it any wonder being near it is so good for us, when water is not only historically considered the key source of life, but it also covers 71% of Earth's surface - and at least 60% of adult human bodies are composed of it?

It's actually somewhat surprising, then, that it's taken so long for the region's tourism industry to take to maritime travel options like, well, a fish to water. Particularly when the Middle East not only has some of the most sought-after strips of beach in the world, but also boasts waters filled with rich and treasured marine life. Cities have sprung up through water-borne trade routes, pearl diving culture, and more. For a part of the world that is primarily associated with the desert, water and its vital, life-supporting element has played a huge role in the MENA region. And now, it's offering a new frontier of opportunity: through the rise of seafaring tourism, from cruises to yachting, sailing, rowing, and diving, and the coastal communities that develop around it all (p.42 and p.56).

Considering more than 80% of the world's oceans remain unmapped and unexplored, the world beneath the surface can feel like an entirely different universe. It's easy to understand why myths of legendary ancient civilisations, from Atlantis to Dwarka, came about. But if you're seeking a whole new world that not only exists on terra firma but is being created as we speak, look no further than Disneyland Abu Dhabi. Disney's seventh resort destination around the world (and the first to open globally since 2016), it will be built and operated by Miral, to grace Yas Island sometime within the next decade, cementing the UAE capital as a world-class entertainment hub (p.34).

In the meantime, any true traveller knows that sheer wonder can always be unlocked by discovering more of this beautiful planet - and we're here to help you do that. From epic hotels that can transport you elsewhere with just a sniff (p.53) to destinations that feel written in the stars (p.37), here's to a summer of more travel magic. Enjoy the issue!

Yi-Hwa Hanna

Yi-Hwa Hanna
Editor

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REGIONAL NEWS
New hotels, flight routes, and more

SUSTAINABILITY
The greener side of tourism & hospitality

GLOBAL NEWS
Happenings from around the world

Dispatch

The latest business travel updates

HOT TICKET

New keys to the kingdom

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts is setting the stage for a major new chapter in Saudi Arabia

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

PART OF THE world-leading hospitality group Accor, the Canadian-born brand will be opening three new properties in Saudi Arabia in the next several years. The first will be the Fairmont Red Sea, opening at the end of 2025, followed by the Fairmont Ajdan Al Khobar in 2027, and the Fairmont Rua Madinah in 2028.

Fairmont Red Sea will have 193 rooms, six dining concepts (with an overwater restaurant), a spa, kids' and teens clubs, and an adjacent 18-hole championship golf course. Fairmont Ajdan Al Khobar will have 160 rooms, serviced apartments, four dining outlets, fitness and spa facilities, and meeting rooms in the bustling centre, while Fairmont Rua Madinah will have 143 rooms, multiple dining venues, 120 branded residences, and a kids club, fitness centre, and spa - establishing the brand's presence in the Holy Cities, alongside its existing iconic property in Makkah.

IMAGE **SUPPLIED**

Mercure lands in Saudi's Aseer region

PART OF ACCOR, the hotel brand has opened a new property in Saudi Arabia's Aseer region, under the management of Amsa Hospitality. Mercure is known for focusing on local inspiration, and the new property – Mercure Khamis Mushait – is the first internationally-branded hotel in the Khamis Mushait area.

Located 15 km from Abha International Airport, the property has 93 contemporary rooms that infuse local flavour through authentic Saudi hospitality and a wide range of cultural offerings within the region.

The Mercure Khamis Mushait is designed for both business and leisure travellers, and features an all-day dining restaurant, a coffee shop, a modern gym, an indoor swimming pool, and a fully equipped meeting room. Laundry services and 24/7 in-room dining are also available.

In celebration of the new property opening, the hotel is offering members of ALL – Accor's award winning loyalty programme – a 20% discount on the best available rate, as well as the chance to earn 4X bonus reward points, on bookings until 31 August 2025 – with a flexible cancellation policy.

DID YOU KNOW?
Founded in 1973, Mercure is dedicated to unveiling the treasures surrounding each address - and it recently achieved a historic milestone by surpassing 1,000 hotels worldwide.

TOP: Terrace, Mercure Khamis Mushait

INSET: Room, Mercure Khamis Mushait

Anatalya's new crown jewel

A new flagship property from the Öztürk Group is set to open this summer in the resort enclave

LOCATED IN the Anatalya-Belek area on Türkiye's Mediterranean coast, Regnum The Crown will be a sister property to the Regnum Carya Golf & Spa Resort.

The new resort will introduce several firsts to the Turkish market – including an adults-only rooftop experience, which is a country-first concept combining an infinity pool, rooftop dining, fitness facilities, and panoramic views. The property will also make available a suite of VIP services that includes private chauffeur transport, helicopter rental, in-room check-in, and 24/7 guest assistance. Guests arriving early or departing late can enjoy time in the Regnum Lounge.

A wide range of cuisines will be on offer, including Pan-Asian, Levantine, French, Slavic, Greek, and Peruvian options. A rooftop venue serves as a highlight, pairing fine dining with sweeping vistas.

Its 4,500 sqm spa will be themed around natural, certified-organic products, offering Turkish baths, open-air Bali-style treatment cabanas,, steam rooms, facial therapies, and a tranquil indoor pool. A wide range of fitness and recreational options will also be available, including tennis courts, padel, FIFA-standard football pitches, and access to the award-winning Carya and National Golf Clubs — home to Europe's first fully-illuminated golf course facilities.

It will have 343 suites and 15 private villas, ranging from 110 sqm to 1,700 sqm, catering to families, couples, and solo travellers alike. Residences will offer private pools, sea and garden views, dedicated butler service, Bvlgari amenities, and bespoke in-room services such as fresh flowers and daily refreshed minibars. Immersive kids' and teens' clubs are available, along with a themed water park, indoor-outdoor play areas, and curated experiences for parents ranging from baby care to party programming. Aspiring young athletes can also take advantage of the sustainability-friendly resort's football clinics, which will be powered by the Real Madrid Foundation.

A Seascape Suite at Regnum The Crown

Regnum The Crown includes an adults-only rooftop, which is a country-first concept with panoramic views

IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

Modern capital

DUBAI'S Sunset Hospitality Group is set to debut its most ambitious project yet, at Rixos Premium Dubai, JBR. A three-storey, 30,000 sq ft entertainment hub called Kapitol, it's set to open in September 2025 and marks SHG's first foray into immersive, game-led hospitality — a bold new vertical for the ever-expanding group.

Blending high-energy social play with premium food, beverage, and live entertainment, Kapitol positions itself as a playground for adults, at the intersection of nostalgia and next-generation fun. Inspired by Art Deco design and vintage cinemas, the experience aims to be theatrical, vibrant and cinematic. The venue is intended to encourage interaction, connection and celebration, with private event spaces also available for tailored gatherings and corporate activations.

The venue has three levels. Level One boasts an eclectic mix of interactive activities, including axe throwing, baseball cages, electric shuffleboard, F1 racing simulators, darts, and arcade games, anchored by a central stage for live DJs and bands, flanked by energetic bars and premium dining options. Level Two has a 14-hole upscale mini-golf course, complete with its own dedicated bar and design-driven ambience. Level Three rounds out the entertainment lineup with ten bowling lanes — including two VIP lanes — alongside three immersive karaoke rooms in partnership with 'The Voice', offering a star-for-a-night experience.

TRAVEL OF TOMORROW

Airports Council International has released a new report on anticipated air traffic growth over the next three decades. Here's what to expect:

The number of global air passengers is set to reach **17.7 billion** by 2043, and **22.3 billion** by 2053 (up from 9.5 billion in 2024)

Aircraft movements (take-offs and landings) are predicted to reach **149 million** by 2043, and **176 million** by 2053

Drivers of growth include rising demand in emerging markets, investment in airport infrastructure and strengthened international travel

ROUTE ROUND-UP

Emirates will be launching a daily nonstop service between Dubai and Hangzhou from 30 July. It will be the airline's fifth destination in China, following Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. The route will be operated on a three-class Boeing 777-300ER, encompassing eight First Class suites, 42 angle-flat Business Class seats and 304 Economy Class seats. The flights will depart Dubai at 0940 and arrive in Hangzhou at 2200; and depart Hangzhou at 0010 and land in Dubai at 04:55

Qatar Airways has announced plans to expand two of its routes to North and South America, via Toronto and Sao Paulo respectively. From 19 June, the carrier will increase the frequency of flights from Doha to Toronto from three to five flights per week. It may also increase the route - which first launched in December 2024 - to daily by winter this year. Meanwhile, from 25 June, the airline will be increasing its long-established Doha-Sao Paulo route from 14 to 17 flights per week.

Etihad Airways has become the first airline to introduce First Class to narrowbody aircraft, with the unveiling of its all-new Airbus A321LR last month. The new aircraft is set to fly from 1 August, and will set a new standard for single-aisle flying - along with the first-ever First Class product to fly on a narrowbody plane. Etihad's new Airbus A321LR will also have 14 lie-flat Business Class seats with direct-aisle access, along with an upgraded Economy Class - plus superfast, streaming wifi.

Saudia has opened a new lounge at Heathrow Terminal 4. The Saudi Arabian flag carrier and SkyTeam member's new loung will be located on the upper floors, and developed by Plaza Premium Group. It will feature an international buffet that includes Saudi coffee and dates, as well as a Tea Bar created in partnership with The London Tea Exchange. It will also have showers with amenities from Urban Apothecary, prayer rooms, a quiet zone, work spaces, and a VIP area with butler service.

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

BIODIVERSITY

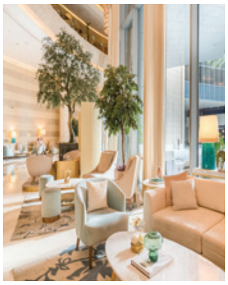
BioBlitz for Six Senses

AS PART OF ITS celebrations for the International Day of Biological Diversity last month, Six Senses launched a group-wide "BioBlitz" event - an initiative that encourages people to document and share their observations of biodiversity in and around Six Senses properties using a mobile app, to foster greater environmental awareness.

"It's a brand-wide team building activity that helps our people engage with nature, while at the same time generating research-quality data for scientists working to better understand and protect nature," said Jeffery Smith, Six Senses' VP of Sustainability. "We will replicate this effort next year and compare results looking for changes in levels of biodiversity. Global biodiversity is a critical turning point, and action is needed urgently to end the steep decline. My sincere thanks go to the team at iNaturalist, a non-profit providing support on species identification and a great app that anyone can download for free and get involved," Smith added.

The activity is offered year-round for guests at some locations, including Six Senses Krabey Island, Cambodia; Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, Vietnam; Six Sense Con Dao, Vietnam; and Six Senses Zighy Bay, Oman. The iNaturalist app is available for free, after which a user can use it to simply "observe" using their camera or uploading photos, suggesting a species, then later confirming its identification. "By documenting what species are living in various locations we are contributing to a more refined understanding of biodiversity," Smith explains.

DID YOU KNOW? Ghost fishing nets contribute to over **50%** of all plastic waste in the oceans

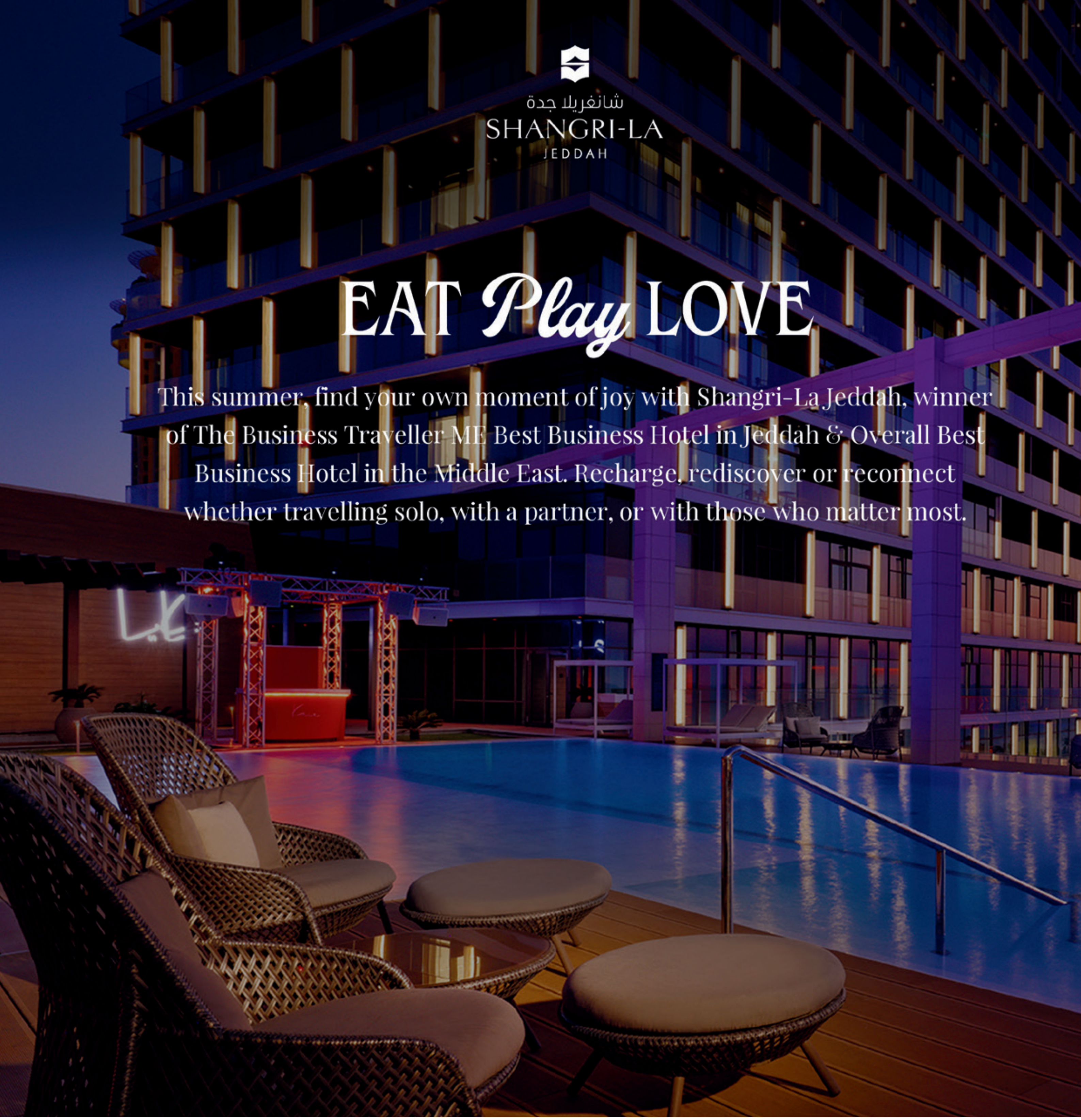


THE KEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

JW MARRIOTT HOTEL MARINA has earned Green Key certification for the eighth year in a row. Bestowed by the Foundation for Environmental Education, the accolade recognises excellence in social and environmental responsibility within tourism and hospitality. Under its banner of "Small Steps, Big Impact", the hotel has eliminated single-use plastic in favour of in-house glass bottling, introduced eco-conscious solutions such as wooden key cards and plastic-free in-room amenities, and adopted a holistic approach to waste management that includes the recycling of plastic, cans, cartons, and used cooking oil, as well as donating surplus food in partnership with the UAE Food Bank.

REGENERATIVE TOURISM

RED SEA GLOBAL – the company behind The Red Sea and AMAALA, as well as the Shebara and Desert Rock resorts – has launched a new brand called Botanica. A landscape nursery previously named The Red Sea Landscape Nursery, Botanica has supplied more than 7 million plants to landscape RSG's destinations since it opened in 2020 – and it's now open to guests, including visits from tourists. Visitors will be able to explore the the nursery first-hand through immersive experiences, including a guided tour around the nursery, the opportunity to plant their own plants, dine in the Botanica Café (which will offer breakfast and lunch), spend some time in the tropical area, and take home souvenirs from the garden shop. Experiences at Botanica can be booked via Red Sea Global's customer care team, via email.



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GET THE SCOOP

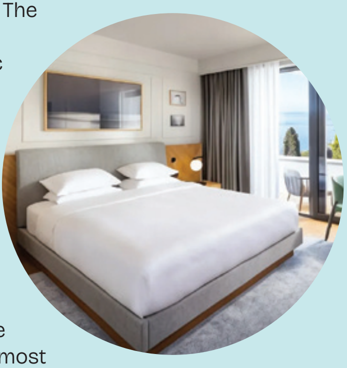
The latest updates in the travel industry from across the world

1 AA's Flagship Suites launches on Chicago-Heathrow route

(Above) American Airlines's newly-delivered Boeing 787-9 aircraft, featuring its new Flagship Suite business class product, launches between Chicago and London Heathrow from 6 June. This will be followed by Philadelphia-Heathrow from 6 August, Philadelphia-Zurich from 3 September, and Dallas-Brisbane from 26 October. The carrier announced plans to launch it on new 787-9 and A321XLR aircraft (as well as 20 retrofitted 777-300ERs) in 2022.

2 Croatia welcomes first Hyatt-branded property

(Right) Hyatt has opened its first hotel in the Balkan country of Croatia: Hyatt Regency Zadar. The 133-room property overlooks the Adriatic Sea, offering an Asian and South American fusion restaurant, a bar, and a spa. Rooms have 65-inch HDTVs, and are inspired by Zadar's sunset (which Alfred Hitchcock once proclaimed to be the most beautiful in the world). The hotel is located within walking distance of the city's UNESCO-listed Old Town.

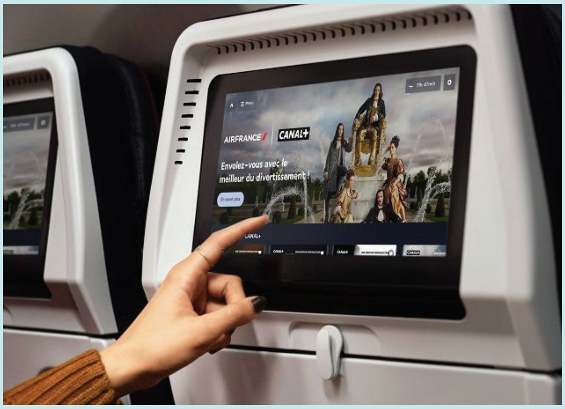


3 Tru by Hilton adds first of 14 properties in Vietnam

(Left) Hilton has debuted its midscale Tru by Hilton brand in the Asia-Pacific region, as part of a deal to reflag 14 existing properties in Vietnam. Tru by Hilton Hanoi Station (previously known as SOJO Hotel Ga Hanoi) is located opposite Hanoi railway station, and features 129 rooms, a fitness centre and free wifi and hot breakfast. A second propety in Ha Long will be followed by hotels in Lang Son and Nam Dinh this year, with nine future locations planned.

4 Air France partners with CANAL+ for long-haul IFE content

(Below) Passengers on its long-haul flights can now watch selected Creation Originale series, comedy shows and documentaries via their IFE system. The move is part of the flag carrier's commitment to devote 30% of its entertainment offering to French productions. All content will be subtitled and adapted for the deaf and hard of hearing. Examples of the type of content onboard include *The Embers*, *Of Money and Blood* and *Versailles* series, as well as comedy shows with Laura Felpin and Roman Frayssinet, and documentaries on travel, discovery, and sport. The selection is renewed each month, and from June it will also include content from CANAL+ Africa.



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WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA,
MARK CASWELL,
HANNAH BRANDLER

5 Qantas to add nonstop Adelaide-Auckland service

(Right) The new flights will take off in October 2025. Qantas says the new route unlocks greater choice for South Australians across the airline's international network, including seamless connections to North America via New Zealand on the airline's QF3 service from Auckland to New York. The route will operate only seasonally, from 31 October 2025 to 3 May 2026, four times a week on a Boeing 737-800 aircraft.

6 Hunnu Air launches E195-E2 flights to Beijing

(Right) The inaugural E2 flight from Ulaanbaatar to Beijing marked the first time the E2 has operated on a scheduled route into mainland China. The flight was operated by the first of two new Embraer E195-E2 aircraft delivered in April 2025. The airline plans to deploy them to increase capacity to Haikou, Sanya, Phu Quoc, to expand services to Japan, China, Vietnam, India, South Korea, and to introduce scheduled flights to Tashkent.

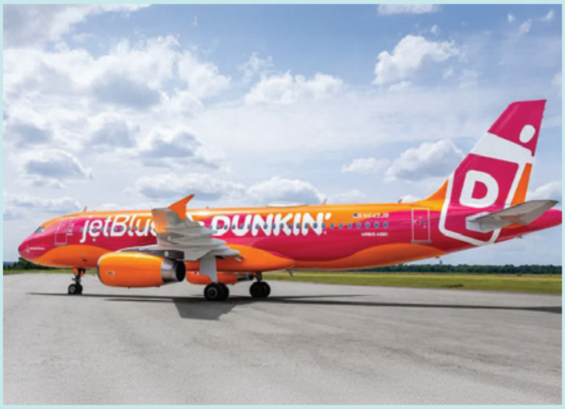
7 Heathrow launches birdwatching tower

(Above) Heathrow has opened a birdwatching tower - the Nature Traffic Control Tower - in Causeway Nature Reserve, one of the 13 biodiversity sites located around and managed by the airport. The structure is designed to look like the real Heathrow control tower. It's free to visit as part of a guided tour of the nature reserve, which is said to be home to 79 species of bird, as well rare spiders and beetles, butterflies, mice, snakes, and various flora.

8 Candlewood Suites makes debut in Europe

(Above) IHG Hotels & Resorts has opened the first European property under its extended stay Candlewood Suites brand, with the unveiling of a 196-apartment hotel in Berlin. Candlewood Suites Berlin Charlottenburg is part of a dual-branded development which also houses the recently opened Holiday Inn – the niu Flash. It follows last year's agreement between IHG and NOVUM Hospitality, to add more than 100 conversion and new-build properties across Germany.

As part of the agreement, IHG's Holiday Inn is being combined with NOVUM's 'the niu' brand, with 52 open and pipeline hotels committed to the new 'Holiday Inn – the niu' co-brand. A further five Candlewood Suites properties are set to open in Germany this year, including locations at Dusseldorf and Berlin airports.



9 JetBlue unveils special Dunkin' livery

(Left) JetBlue celebrated its long-standing partnership with Boston-based coffee and doughnut brand Dunkin' by unveiling a special livery on one of its A320 aircraft. The Brewing Altitude livery features Dunkin's pink and orange branding complete with a donut and coffee cup-themed tailfin. JetBlue customers have been able to enjoy Dunkin's Original Blend coffee inflight since 2006, and Dunkin' became the carrier's exclusive onboard coffee provider in 2011.

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Insight

Expert opinions on the future of travel

Luxury for every season

Yi-Hwa Hanna chats with **Guenter Gebhard**, Regional Vice President & General Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Riyadh at Kingdom Centre, about the the evolution of the modern business traveller, how time is the new luxury, and how this has led to the rise of "bleisure" travel

What is the modern business or leisure traveller looking for?
Business travellers prioritise speed, discretion, and convenience. Leisure travellers seek engagement, memory, and authenticity. Both expect intuitive service, modern design, and a personalised experience that reflects the identity of the place. Where those expectations intersect, the real opportunity to differentiate begins.

You recently won the title of Best Bleisure Hotel in the Middle East at the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* awards. Congratulations! What does this win mean to you?
It's a meaningful recognition of how we've evolved with the market. At Four Seasons, we've always been a guest-centric brand and that extends naturally into the leisure space. As Saudi Arabia's travel profile changes, we've reshaped the experience to reflect new patterns, where business and downtime increasingly overlap. This award highlights the team's ability to anticipate that shift and deliver with consistency and intent.

Why is "bleisure" on the rise?
Time has become the true luxury. When destinations offer depth beyond the meeting room, travellers take notice. Guests today look to extract more value from their journeys, whether that's discovery, comfort, or cultural relevance. Cities like Riyadh, with increasing connectivity and momentum, are perfectly positioned for this shift.

What are your expansion plans in Saudi Arabia?
Four Seasons is actively expanding its footprint in Saudi Arabia across diverse locations, including Red Sea, AMAALA, NEOM, Madinah, Jeddah, Diriyah, AlUla, Khobar and Makkah, with more developments in the pipeline. Beyond hotels, the brand is also investing in branded residences, reflecting the growing demand for luxury living spaces. **BT**

> "When destinations offer depth beyond the meeting room, travellers take notice"

IMAGES **FOUR SEASONS HOTEL RIYADH**

Regal Hospitality

We chat with Parveen Chander Kumar, Executive Vice President – Commercial of Indian Hotels Company Limited, about embracing heritage and true luxury in hospitality

Q&A

One of the Indian Hotels Company Limited's hero brands is Taj Hotels. The design and aesthetics of Taj's properties are so unique and culturally-rich. Why do you think it's so important to have such a distinct link to India's heritage across Taj hotels around the world?
Taj hotels offer a sense of place by integrating elements that reflect the local culture, showcasing the distinct character and spirit of the location. Taj has been recognised as the World's Strongest Hotel Brand for the third time as per Brand Finance's *Hotels 50 2024* annual report.

Intrinsically bound with the country's history, Taj hotels has long been heralded as a purveyor of Indian heritage. Continuing its legacy of shaping heritage tourism, Taj has restored some of the country's most iconic royal palaces, transforming them into immersive experiences of Indian royalty. These grand palaces, some dating back to the 1700s, now offer guests a rare opportunity to live like Maharajas, blending historic grandeur with Taj's signature hospitality. With its presence across key historic destinations such as Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Gwalior, Hyderabad, Varanasi, and Mumbai, the brand focuses on conserving the cultural heritage of the regions.

Every Taj hotel worldwide is a tribute to its surroundings, offering guests an authentic and immersive experience that captures the essence of its unique location. Through thoughtful design, locally-inspired architecture, and culinary offerings, as well as bespoke experiences, a stay at the Taj ensures a deep connection to the heart of the destination.

How would you describe the type of hospitality that the Taj brand offers guests? How do you want them to feel when they enter – and how do you want them to feel when they leave?
With more than 120 years of pioneering Indian hospitality, our exclusive properties, flawless service, and distinctive brands, all embody our cherished notion of 'Tajness' - [which centers around] creating unforgettable experiences for our guests.

The Taj brand has a portfolio of 129 hotels, with 42 currently under development. Present across various formats of iconic royal palaces, landmark city hotels, wildlife safaris, as well as hill and beach resorts, Taj is continuing to expand its global presence while staying rooted in its legacy of warmth and authenticity.

> "Taj has restored some of the country's most iconic royal palaces, transforming them into immersive experiences"

Tell us about the upcoming Ras Al Khaimah property. What can people expect? When is it anticipated to launch, and what was behind the decision to launch this new residential property?
Taj Wellington Mews, Al Marjan, Ras Al Khaimah marks a significant strategic expansion for IHCL into the branded residences segment in the Middle East. Located on the rapidly-developing Al Marjan Island, this project is being developed in partnership with BNW Developments. This greenfield project marks IHCL's entry into Ras Al Khaimah with the launch of its premier branded hotel apartments.

Ras Al-Khaimah's unique cultural heritage, natural beauty, and significant infrastructure development make it an increasingly compelling destination for global travellers

Set against the backdrop of the Arabian Peninsula and enclosed by the Yanas mountain and Jebel Jais, the 336 apartments at Taj Wellington Mews, Al Marjan Island, Ras Al Khaimah will feature an array of culinary experiences, including an all-day dining restaurant, a speciality restaurant, a bar, and a lounge. To cater to the needs of business travellers, the hotel will feature a range of meeting and event spaces, including versatile meeting rooms, and a state-of-the-art board room. Unwind and rejuvenate at the fully equipped gym, outdoor swimming pool, or luxurious spa offering treatments and therapies.

Can you share any news with us regarding plans for the region in the next few years?
In line with our strategy roadmap, Accelerate 2030, IHCL is in the midst of expanding its presence in international markets with a focus on the Middle East. We currently operate three properties in Dubai: Taj Dubai, Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, The Palm, Dubai and Taj Jumeirah Lakes Towers, Dubai. The announcement of Taj Wellington Mews on Al Marjan Island in Ras Al Khaimah has marked our entry into the branded residences segment in the UAE.

IHCL has signed two Taj hotels; a luxury hotel and boutique resort in the kingdom of Bahrain. Taj has also signed one hotel in the Holy City of Makkah, marking its foray in Saudi Arabia. We are actively exploring opportunities in UAE and GCC markets. **BT**

IMAGES SUPPLIED

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OPINION

LUXURY CRUISES ARE SAILING INTO A NEW ERA

A quiet transformation is taking place across the high seas, and luxury ocean travel is no longer simply a means to get from A to B

Today, these ships are destinations in their own right, that can rival the finest five-star hotels in experience, service, and design. And nowhere is this shift more evident than in the growing demand from the Middle East region. Across the UAE, KSA, Qatar, and beyond, affluent travellers are increasingly drawn to luxury cruises not for the novelty of travel, but for the opportunity to explore the world in a way that aligns with their values: privacy, exclusivity, wellness, and immersive cultural experiences. As regional travel preferences evolve, so too does the definition of luxury – and cruising is rising to meet that expectation in full.

A lifestyle, not just a journey

The GCC's discerning travellers are seeking more than bucket-list destinations; they are searching for transformative, tailored experiences that allow them to disconnect meaningfully and reconnect with what matters. Luxury cruises today cater to that need with highly curated itineraries, wellness-led programming, and a slower pace of travel; one that encourages depth over breadth.

In a world of increasingly crowded airports and back-to-back agendas, the appeal of unpacking once and waking up somewhere new each day cannot be overstated. But it is not just about convenience. The new generation of luxury cruise ships is purpose-built to offer space, calm, and time – values that are becoming rarer and more prized in modern life

For high-net-worth individuals in the GCC, privacy is paramount. Luxury cruises now offer discreet, villa-style suites, butler service, and dedicated spaces that ensure guests can enjoy the journey on their own terms. Personalisation is another cornerstone. From dining preferences to bespoke shore excursions, travellers can now expect a level of service that feels both intuitive and entirely individualised.

The demand for this kind of hospitality is also rooted in regional cultural preferences. Multigenerational travel, for example, is particularly important for many GCC families. Luxury cruises offer the ideal environment: children entertained, adults indulged, and shared moments designed to suit everyone's needs.

The rise of conscious travel, digital nomadism, and purpose-driven tourism signals a profound transformation in the travel industry. These trends demand a shift from transactional services to immersive, experience-led offerings. The sector must adapt by fostering deeper cultural engagement, curating bespoke itineraries that prioritise sustainability, and embracing flexibility to accommodate travellers' evolving lifestyles.

> 'These journeys are not just about seeing a place, but experiencing it'

SETTING SAIL Truly immersive ocean travel experiences to some of the world's most incredible destinations can provide an unparalleled connection to nature and onself

The Ocean State of Mind

For GCC travellers who have already "done" the classic cities and hotspots, luxury cruises are opening doors to more remote, less accessible parts of the world. From the Norwegian fjords to the South Pacific, from Japanese islands to the Chilean fjords, cruise itineraries now chart routes once reserved for the most intrepid explorers – with all the elegance and comfort expected from the world's best hospitality brands.

The next frontier of luxury travel lies in offering transformative experiences where indulgence meets regeneration - allowing guests to explore the world while contributing to its preservation, all within an atmosphere of refined elegance and thoughtful service. These journeys are not just about seeing a place, but about experiencing it through immersive, culturally sensitive programming: local tastings, expert-led excursions, and meaningful connections with people and places.

The upward trend is clear: GCC travellers are increasingly choosing quality over quantity, immersion over ticking boxes. Luxury cruising – once an afterthought in the regional travel conversation – is now at the forefront of how travellers from this region are looking to see the world.

As the industry continues to innovate, what remains constant is the traveller's desire for purposeful discovery. In a time when travel is being redefined, a new generation of sea journeys offers something increasingly rare – the chance to savour time, space, and perspective. This is travel not just across oceans, but into a more present, more meaningful way of experiencing the world. **BT**

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

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OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Yi-Hwa Hanna chats to **Rajan Datar**, award-winning broadcaster, moderator, musician, and presenter of the BBC News channel's *The Travel Show*

Q & A

You've reported on current affairs, arts, and business, presented documentaries, and produced for the BBC for three decades now, with a focus on travel programming. What ignites your passion for travel? I have travelled all my life. As a London-born child of Indian immigrants to the UK, we would be flying back and forth sometimes several times a year. It became engrained in my psyche, and as a teenager, I would feel restless if I wasn't on the move. I'd wistfully look at any overhead airliner (we lived quite near Heathrow's flight path), wishing I could hoist myself up on board! Professionally, I was travelling a lot in my twenties – as both a broadcaster and as a member of a nine-piece band. That trend has carried on with my presenting of many and various travel series. It is a relentless curiosity that drives me to travel; to meet new people and engage with new cultures. It's this curiosity that inspires me and *The Travel Show* team to bring engaging travel journalism to our audience. But I have to be careful that it doesn't slip into FOMO!

We've heard that you've wrestled in Mongolia, abseiled with refuse collectors in the favelas of Brazil, and played on stage at a music festival in Vietnam. Tell us more! I was petrified when I heard that in Mongolia, one of my tasks for *The Travel Show* was to grapple with a professional Mongolian wrestler in the Gobi desert in front of an audience celebrating three traditional so-called "manly sports". My fear increased when in the bout before mine, a contestant appeared to break his arm. My keenest advice before my fight was to grab my opponent's legs and hold on for dear life. He was built like a refrigerator, and very kindly allowed me to flail around and grab his legs before picking me up with what felt like his little finger, and gently throwing me over his shoulder. The abseiling in the favelas was an astonishing experience. It was in the run-up to the Rio Olympics and the refuse collectors were busy cleaning up the city. But I had not bargained for the kind of things they found on the hillsides – like weapons, and even dead bodies, I was told!

Any other particularly crazy travel moments among your most memorable experiences? So many. Singing with a polyphonic male choir in the mountains of the Caususes in Georgia was a pretty incredible experience. Twenty men got into our van in the morning, and the first stop was to buy alcohol. I had to learn some lyrics and sing with them. They wore brilliant costumes and despite the booze, did some amazingly agile dancing. Playing the washboard with a zydeco band in New Orleans in front of thousands was another highlight, as well as trips on various flying contraptions in far flung places. Ultimately, it's the rich array of characters I have met on my many trips. Also, as a member of a small team abroad on intense filming trips, you get to know your work colleagues pretty well, and strong friendships are forged.

Asking a keen traveller what their favourite destination is can be like asking someone to pick a favourite child – so instead, I'll ask: What's the best place you've been for relaxation, adventure, luxury, and something totally unique? Well, it all comes down to the specific experiences in the end – but in no particular order I would say Colombia, Mexico, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan rank highly as destinations I've really enjoyed. We don't really do luxury on the programme and I'm terrible at relaxing and sunbathing – so really, it's down to the unique adventures that the producers conjure up to both embarrass me and entertain the audience!

Where have you not been yet, that's on the top of your bucket list? Ghana – apparently it has a brilliant music scene; Bahia in Brazil for the same reason; and Beirut – because it sounds like one of the most resilient and interesting places on the planet.

What are your thoughts on the use of technology in the travel industry? I'm fascinated by the prospect of hologrammed virtual travel companions – who, armed with the knowledge of all your likes and dislikes, generative AI, and a geolocator, can suggest what you might like to do anywhere you end up in the world. This is something I came across recently with a new app that is still in its early stages, but promises so much...

What's the most interesting thing you've learned about people from travelling? There is a quote I like to use by the writer Dagobert D. Runes along the lines of: "We travel thousands of miles to watch in fascination the kinds of people we would ignore at home". Something in us changes when we travel – we find the most mundane things really interesting. Also, people have a very similar sense of humour the world over. Around every corner there is a potential soulmate: people you just instantly get on with.

What's the first thing you do when arriving at a new destination? Unpack, and then get the hell out of your room and outside (if it's not too late).

What three things do you always pack? Earl Grey teabags, my iPad, and a great novel – which hopefully I won't have time to read...

What is your earliest holiday memory? Pretending to steer a speedboat in a lake in Switzerland. I thought I was actually steering it but seeing I was only about five years old, it now seems unlikely.

How do you usually spend your frequent flyer miles? I don't get as many as I used to... but it would usually be on a short haul trip to Europe for a few days. **BT**

IMAGE SUPPLIED

ABOVE FROM LEFT: Christian Potvin;; Lobby of Cheval Maison - Expo City Dubai; a living area in one of the suites at the hotel

BOTTOM: Royal City Suite at Cheval Maison - Expo City Dubai

The Elevator Pitch

Business Traveller Middle East gives **Christian Potvin**, General Manager of Cheval Maison – Expo City Dubai, five minutes to pitch his property to prospective guests

Cheval Collection's latest property in the Middle East, Cheval Maison – Expo City Dubai, opened in March 2025, just before Ramadan, with 151 luxurious, serviced apartments and a host of top-flight business and leisure amenities.

There are many aspects that make this property so special, including the fact that it's a reimagining of the showpiece Leadership Pavilion that hosted world leaders during Expo 2020 Dubai and COP28. The prestigious building has been transformed into the area's most luxurious hotel apartment complex, with the original architecture retained in order to preserve – and celebrate – the Expo 2020 legacy. The lobby, with its high ceilings, marble, and stunning creative art centrepiece, has to be seen to be believed.

Located at the heart of Expo City, alongside the iconic Wasl Plaza and just five minutes' walk from the metro, Cheval Maison is a magnet for discerning residents, business travellers, and holidaymakers who want home-away-from-home luxury – be it for one night or on a permanent basis. Some of the apartments directly overlook the inside of Wasl Plaza: brilliant viewing for the concerts and shows that Expo City is famous for!

Continuing the VIP legacy from Expo 2020, we have received several royal guests and prominent leaders pre-and post-opening. Our clientele is a mix of loyal customers who are familiar with our brand, and new customers wanting luxurious, home-away-from-home living. With the expansion of the neighbouring Dubai Exhibition Centre and the future opening of Al Maktoum International Airport, Cheval Maison is poised as the accommodation of choice for visitors to major international events.

‘It’s a reimagining of the Leadership Pavilion that hosted world leaders during Expo 2020 Dubai’

High-end accommodation and top-flight facilities are the hallmarks of all Cheval Collection properties. Cheval Maison – Expo City Dubai offers a range of beautiful rooms, studios and one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, all with premium finishes, luxury furnishings and a fully-equipped private kitchen. Available for short-term and long stays, the apartments include Metro Rooms, studios, one- to three-bedroom units, Royal Suites and two- and three-bedroom penthouses. Most have at least one balcony.

Another key feature of the property is the 450 sqm Royal Majlis – which was a regular meeting place for world leaders during Expo, and the largest of three Majlis at Cheval Maison. These, as well as general meeting rooms, are all available for guests' use and for private hire.

We have also carefully planned our dining facilities to cater for every preference, palette, and pocket, with a range of venues including TEN-11 all day restaurant, 7seven7 coffee shop and bakery, and PDL café.

And with our focus on fitness, well-being and relaxation, Cheval Maison has a rooftop pool commanding sweeping views across Expo City and nearby areas of Dubai, as well as a state-of-the-art gym, yoga studio, and sauna. Extensive, landscaped grounds provide a peaceful setting for a morning jog or evening stroll. For our two- and four-legged guests, with Expo City Dubai being one of Dubai's major pet-friendly destinations, Cheval Maison happily accommodates pets at the apartments as well as some common areas. **BT**

IMAGES **CHEVAL MAISON – EXPO CITY DUBAI**

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New York City

WORDS **ALLYSON PORTEE**

From iconic museums and theatres to glitzy shops and restaurants, there's plenty to do in the city that never sleeps

KNOWN AS THE "Big Apple," the once former capital of the United States is the hustle-and-bustle must-visit city that can still be enjoyed during a layover or day trip from the surrounding New York City area, or even from Washington, DC or Philadelphia.

IMAGE MBBIRDY/GETTY IMAGES

Explore NEW YORK CITY

WORDS
ALLYSON PORTEE

MORNING
Manhattan is about 45 minutes from JFK Airport. A ride-share is between US$75-130, a taxi is about US$100, and the subway is about US$11.40. From LaGuardia Airport, it's about US$65 for a 25-minute taxi ride into Manhattan; Uber Shuttle is around US$22, while public transport is US$2.70. You'll want to start your day in SoHO (also known as lower Manhattan), at The Manner Hotel. Part of Hyatt, at this newly-opened hotel on the tree-lined Thompson Street, you can enjoy breakfast and its modernism Italian design. SoHo is where many luxury fashion brands are housed, so you can shop while taking in the period tenement housing and their renowned fire escapes that go back to the 1860s. New York University (NYU) is a stone's throw away, and as you walk around the neighbourhood, you'll get a feel of university life through the many coffee shops and pizza parlours. Washington Square Arch is nearby, in Greenwich Village. Made of Tuckahoe marble, the arch celebrates the centennial of George Washington's 1789 inauguration as the first president of the US. In all seasons, New Yorkers can be seen enjoying the park and congregating around the square the arch is housed in. Walking through Greenwich Village, and heading towards Midtown, you'll feel the pace of the city quicken. Madison Square Park in the Flatiron district is a great place to catch your breath. You'll find hot dog stands all around - a classic snack to fuel the long walk from SoHo. NYC is known for its entertainment, and the nearby Joyce Theatre is a stone's throw from the Flatiron Building, where you can enjoy some of the best contemporary dance shows at an affordable price.

ABOVE FROM LEFT: Central Park and the city skyline; Greenwich Village **BELOW:** Butter **BOTTOM:** Street signs

'Don't miss Central Park's The Great Lawn - a site you've no doubt seen in the movies'

AFTERNOON
A visit to The Metropolitan Museum of Art - also known as the Met, and where the renowned Met Gala is held annually - is a must. There are a plethora of exhibits ranging from visual art to fashion year-round. You can easily spend a couple of hours inside. Directly behind the museum is Central Park. Don't skip The Great Lawn - a site you've no doubt seen in the movies. Shakespeare in the Park (which reopened during spring 2025) is a great place to see plays, and you can climb the stairs to Belvedere Castle. If you walk along the West side of the park, you'll take in more greenery, or you can hop in taxi and head to Times Square - you'll want to take a few taxis in the city to get an idea of NYC life.

Walking from 47th Street down Broadway to 42nd Street is the best way to see the lights and feel the energy of where the ball is dropped every New Year's Eve. It's always packed, but you can find your own Times Square moments. If you stand on the elevated platforms, you can have someone take your photo with the TV screens in the background. Refuel at Greek From Greece, a comforting yet friendly fast food restaurant on 7th Avenue with build-your-own bowls, wraps, gyros, salads, and excellent baklava. You may also want to do some shopping at the original Macy's Department Store a block away, on 34th Street - which is also where the famous Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is held.

EVENING
Walking down 5th Avenue is a beautiful way to check key sites off your NYC tourist list. Here, you can check out Trump Tower, and the iconic Tiffany & Co. jewellery store, and the awe-inspiring St. Patrick's Cathedral and Rockefeller Center. If you're an Art Deco fiend, then the latter is the place for you, where you'll find 14 original buildings. Come dinnertime, one great pick in the area is Butter (yes, the one mentioned in *Gossip Girl*). Founded by restaurateur Richie Akiva and helmed by executive chef and *Food Network* star Alex Guarnaschelli, it's a great spot for a family, work, or romantic meal alike. The menu isn't overwhelming, and a good place to start is with the Parkerhouse Rolls that come with house-made butter. The thick-cut veal bacon with red wine mustard boasts rich flavours, while the Di Palo's burrata with fava beans and mint jalapenos melts in the mouth. The gnocchi "mac & cheese" is a house signature, and choice entrées include pan-roasted Atlantic salmon, pan-seared branzino, grilled cauliflower with coconut milk, and Beef Wellington made with prime filet, served with maitake mushrooms and bone marrow gravy. **BT**

Emirates flies direct from Dubai to New York's JFK, and Etihad Airways flies there direct from Abu Dhabi.

IMAGES **AERIAL FILM STUDIO, LOURDESCONVERTIDA, PHOTOSPIRIT/ADOBE STOCK; BUTTER**

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What does it mean to win an award from *Business Traveller Middle East*? We spoke to a handful of our 2025 winners on how the recognition is helping take their teams and their brands to another level

Raising The Bar

KELVIN TAN

VICE-PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF OPERATIONS, SINGAPORE CHANGI AIRPORT

'AFTER SEVERAL OTHER awards from home, I'm now proud to be bringing back the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Award for Best Airport In The World, to Singapore Changi Airport. It's a great feeling. Dubai is a lovely place, and we are a staunch supporter of *Business Traveller Middle East*. One of the best things about these awards is the diversity that it showcases. [This brand's Awards] has been very diverse in its offerings, embracing various changes, and it's really about the evolution of travelling in the Middle East [and beyond]. I'm very glad to bring this award home for Singapore Changi Airport.'

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

GERRIT SCHMIDT

GENERAL MANAGER, MARRIOTT PALM RESORT JUMEIRAH

'I'M REALLY PLEASED to have been part of the 2025 edition of the *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards. It's a night that's all about celebration, and recognising the best of the best in the industry, from airlines to hospitality [and everything in between]. It's so nice to be a part of it - and to see our beautiful resort featured in the magazine on every table that evening! If you haven't yet been to our property, please do come and visit!'

***Editor's Note:** Marriott Resort Palm Jumeirah won the 2025 Business Traveller Middle East Award for Best Leisure Hotel in the Middle East.*

'It's a night that is all about celebration, and recognising the best of the best in the industry'

VIRGINIE LIDAWI

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF LOYALTY MARKETING FOR MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL'S MARRIOT BONVOY, EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA

'WE ARE REALLY PROUD of winning the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Award for Best Hotel Loyalty Programme in the Middle East, for what I think is now the sixth year in a row! The reason why we are so proud is because we do everything we can to please our members, and make sure they enjoy their stay(s), while experiencing the most memorable journeys thanks to Marriott Bonvoy. We're really happy, and our winning of this award is truly all thanks to our wonderful members.'

2025 Business Traveller Awards
BEST HOTEL LOYALTY PROGRAMME IN THE MIDDLE EAST
Marriott Bonvoy
BusinessTraveller.com

PAWEL GUMINSKI

CLUSTER GENERAL MANAGER, PREMIER INN HOTELS - MIDDLE EAST: PREMIER INN DUBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT & PREMIER INN AL JADDAF

'WE WON THE AMAZING title of Best Airport Hotel in the Middle East at the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards, for Premier Inn Dubai International Airport. Premier Inn Dubai International Airport has been open for almost 14 years, and I now can't and don't want to see anybody else coming close to the award that we got this year! Our team is absolutely thrilled to win this award.'

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

A winning celebration

ON 21 MAY, *Business Traveller Middle East* held an intimate post-awards celebratory gathering for the winners of the 2025 awards, along with some highly-commended names, friends of the brand, and industry leaders. It was a beautiful evening of felicitations and connection, with a chance for key movers and shakers from across the industry to enjoy quality conversations, network, toast to each others' hard work, and recognise the incredible vision and forward-thinking action that is driving the industry's travel industry, - encompassing its aviation, hotel, and tourism sectors - into an ever-brighter future. Sponsored by Blacklane - the premium global chauffeur service loved by executives, travellers, and savvy professionals across the region - and hosted by InterContinental Residences Dubai Business Bay at their beautiful ground-floor venue, Ancora, it was an evening of festivity and hope as we all aim to continue excelling throughout the year ahead.

IMAGES SUPPLIED

HASSAN MALIK

PARTNER, DELOITTE MIDDLE EAST

'WE'RE PROUD for the second year running to collaborate with *Business Traveller Middle East*, to produce the Travel Insight Report 2025.'

GHAITH ADNAN

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS, FOUR SEASONS HOTEL DUBAI INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL CENTRE

'WE WON Best Business Hotel in Dubai at the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards. It's a massive honour. I think this is the fifth year that we've bagged this award, and it's really a testament to how we cater to the business guest. It's very important to us, and we [are looking forward to] next year!'

MOHAMED MAHMOUD

CLUSTER GENERAL MANAGER, IHG HOTELS & RESORTS: INTERCONTINENTAL RESIDENCES DUBAI BUSINESS BAY AND KIMPTON DUBAI

'BUSINESS TRAVELLER MIDDLE EAST, to me, is an exceptional brand itself, with great outreach, and that is very trusted. We are so grateful to be associated with this magazine. InterContinental Residences Dubai Business Bay winning the award for Best Bleisure Hotel at the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards makes me feel humble and delighted, and I'm very much looking forward to seeing what the next year will hold! See you then, and thank you so much.'

MOHAMMED HAREB ALMHEIRI

CHIEF PROCUREMENT & TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, FLYDUBAI

'WE'RE VERY GLAD to have received the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards for Airline With The Best Connectivity In The Middle East. Thank you so much.'

JOE NASSOURA

GENERAL MANAGER, FAIRMONT DUBAI

'I'M SO HAPPY to introduce Fairmont Dubai as the winner of the award for Best Refurbished Hotel in the Middle East, at the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards. The hotel is 22 years old, and we just finished the renovation last year. and we're so happy to achieve this amazing award. Thank you so much for this recognition [of all of our work]!'

2025 BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS
BEST HOTEL BRAND IN THE MIDDLE EAST
Radisson
BusinessTraveller.com

BASEL TALAL

MANAGING DIRECTOR KSA, KUWAIT, AND LEVANT, RADISSON HOTEL GROUP

'RADISSON WON the title of Best Hotel Brand in the Middle East at the 2025 *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards. This award is a recognition of our efforts for the last year, and this means that our expansion strategy is working very well in the region! I truly appreciate the acknowledgement.' **BT**

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

HOLIDAY PACKING GUIDE

Whether you're a culture vulture or hot for holistic health escapes, these picks will help upgrade your summer break to a whole new level

BEACH *VACATION*

Live your best *White Lotus*-worthy life with resort-approved picks

MINIMALIST Lip Balm SPF 30 8g; **Dhs37.50**; beminimalist.co

AERY Good Vibes Pure Soy Candle 200g; **Dhs331**; bloomingdales.ae

CB2 Brass Lotus Candle Holder - The White Lotus; **Dhs525**; cb2.ae

ANTHROPOLOGIE Celandine Crochet Long-Sleeve Mini Kaftan; **Dhs370**; anthropologie.com

CITY *BREAK*

Speak volumes across the world's top cities with a touch of timeless luxury

PARAVEL Aviator Trunk Suitcase; **Dhs2,185.45**; tourparavel.com

VERSACE Ballpoint Pen in Stainless Steel; **Dhs951**; versace.com

VAN CLEEF & ARPELS Lady Arpels Bal des Amoureux Automate Watch; **Dhs625,000;** vancleefarpels.com

CALVIN KLEIN Acetate Modified Rectangle Sunglasses; **Dhs730**; calvinklein.us

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

CRUISE CAPERS

Sail through sunny days with chic comfort and easy luxury

PLEIN SPORT Laserstrike Silicone Watch; **Dhs440**; pleinsport.com

THE GIVING MOVEMENT Nautical Marine Collection; from **Dhs299**; thegivingmovement.com

BOADICEA THE VICTORIOUS Opal; **Dhs4,371**; boadiceaperfume.com (also available at atelierperfumery.com)

APPLE Watch Series 10; **From Dhs1,599**; apple.com

WELLNESS RESET

Refocus your mind, body, and soul for power and positivity

HAPBEE Neckband; **Dhs915**; hapbee.com (also available at Talise Spa, Jumeirah Al Qasr)

MANDUKA PRO Travel Yoga Mat 2mm; **Dhs275**; manduka.com

SANTONI Men's Beige Suede And Leather Bounce Sneaker; **Dhs2,455**; santonishoes.com

PMD BEAUTY Aqua Water Bottle; **Dhs369**; ounass.com

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

Our guide to... the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)

Last year, the UK's ETA programme was extended to nationals from Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE - and it's been expanding further in 2025. Here's how to navigate it smoothly

IMAGE **YG STUDIO/ADOBE STOCK**

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE were once able to enjoy visa-free entry to the UK, with no need to make any declarations or applications to the Home Office. However, that has changed through the new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) requirement that began one and a half years ago with staged rollouts, and which now affects travellers from Europe, North America, and beyond.

The system is similar to the digital ESTA programme in place in the US, or the Australian ETA. The Home Office estimates there will be around 30 million applications each year once it has fully launched.

The government has said the introduction of the ETA will "digitise the borders" and "help to strengthen the UK's border security and improve the travel experience", though critics have questioned the decision, saying it adds hurdles for foreign visitors to gain entry.

The scheme was officially launched in November 2023, starting with Qatari nationals, to be extended to other visitors over the following few years. Here we give an overview of the new scheme.

What is it?

The Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) is a new piece of digital documentation granting people permission to travel or transit in the UK. It is an extra step of pre-clearance before travel, that does not replace travel documentation or guarantee the right to enter the country. Visitors will still need to pass through border control and security as normal.

An ETA will be required for visitors travelling for tourism, visiting family or friends, business or short-term studies, or transiting, with stays allowed for up to six months. An ETA will be required whether travelling via boat, plane or train, and boarding will be denied without an ETA. Visitors coming for other reasons, such as long-term work or study, will need to apply for the appropriate visa.

Who will need an ETA?

The ETA will apply to all foreign nationals who currently do not require a visa to travel to the UK, including children. This will affect millions of people who have previously had no contact with the Home Office, such as US, European, and Australian nationals.

Who will not need an ETA?

People with British or Irish passports (or who have legal residency in Ireland), permission to live, work or study in the UK, or those with visas to visit the UK will not

WORDS
TAMSIN COCKS

need an ETA. Dual nationals should travel on their British or Irish passport.

When does it come into effect?

The rollout of the ETA system will be phased over the next few years. The new system started with nationals from Qatar, who need an ETA to travel to the UK as of 15 November 2023.

It was then extended to nationals from Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE from 22 February 2024.

The scheme was further expanded to 48 countries worldwide (including the US, Australia and New Zealand) from 8 January, 2025, and then to 34 European countries from 2 April, 2025 (with applications made available from 5 March 2025).

How do I apply?

Applicants can apply at gov.uk or via the ETA app before booking travel to the UK. You'll be required to enter your passport details and travel information, and will need to travel on the same passport used in the application.

Individuals can apply for an ETA on behalf of others, for example, office travel managers can apply on behalf of colleagues who will be travelling. Each traveller will need their own ETA.

How much will it cost?

A single application will cost £10.

How long does it take to process?

Successful applications are expected to take up to a maximum of three days to process. Applicants will receive an email confirmation, and the ETA will be linked electronically to their passport. A paper copy is not required, but can be useful as a backup in case of technical errors. Applications that require further investigation may take longer.

How long is the ETA valid for?

The ETA will last for two years and can be used for multiple journeys. If your passport expires during that time, you will need to apply for a new ETA.

What happens if I am denied an ETA?

If your application for an ETA is unsuccessful, there is no appeal process. In such cases, the individual's next port of call would be to apply for a Standard Visitor visa, which would require a more comprehensive overview of personal information/travel and immigration history. Alternatively, visitors may be able to apply for a Temporary Work – Creative Worker visa or a transit visa. **BT**

A Whole New World

The Walt Disney Company and Miral are bringing a Disney Theme Park and Resort to Abu Dhabi's Yas Island

Disney
ABU DHABI

ABOVE In May 2025, Yas Island Abu Dhabi lit up with the biggest celebration of its kind for the announcement of Abu Dhabi's Disney Theme Park and Resort

The announcement was made last month, generating a buzz from the world's top media outlets and legions of Disney fans from across the globe

It wasn't just the historic milestone being announced that caused such a stir - it was also the way it was announced. The event was a breathtaking spectacle, including an epic live show featuring a record-breaking number of drones, a symphony of fireworks, and a star-studded lineup of live performances that left the crowd speechless. Under a sky illuminated by over 9,000 choreographed drones and breathtaking fireworks, Yas Island transformed into the stage for what is now being hailed as the most spectacular announcement show the region has ever witnessed. The waterfront came alive with a once-in-a-lifetime performance featuring a world-class lineup: piano virtuoso Lang Lang, West End powerhouse Kerry Ellis, rising classical star Sonya Balsara, and beloved Emirati icon Rashed Alnuaimi. This glittering celebration attracted global celebrities including Tyrese Gibson, Naomi Campbell, Nancy Ajram, Chiara Ferragni, and Ed Westwick, dignitaries, and media powerhouses, all converging to witness the unveiling of what promises to be a game-changing chapter in Disney's legacy, and in the evolution of Yas Island as a global destination for entertainment. Through this truly groundbreaking new partnership, Miral, Abu Dhabi's leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences, has partnered with The Walt Disney Company (NYSE: DIS) to create a landmark Disney theme park resort in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The waterfront resort will be located on Yas Island: a world-class destination for entertainment and leisure, connecting travellers from the Middle East and Africa, India, Asia, Europe, and beyond.

The new venture will be the seventh Disney theme park resort in the world - and the first new location to open globally since 2016. It will combine Disney's iconic stories, characters and attractions with Abu Dhabi's vibrant culture, stunning shorelines, and breathtaking architecture, to offer visitors from across the region (and far beyond) a truly oustanding blend of signature Disney magic and Abu Dhabi's cultural heritage and world-class service.

Speaking on the new project, His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman at Miral, said: "Abu Dhabi is a place where heritage meets innovation, where we preserve our past while designing the future." He continued: "The collaboration between Abu Dhabi and Disney demonstrates the remarkable results of combining visionary leadership and creative excellence. What we are creating with Disney in Abu Dhabi is a whole new world of imagination — an experience that will inspire generations across the region and the world, creating magical moments and memories that families will treasure forever. Through the development of unique attractions and experiences, Abu Dhabi continues to be a destination of choice for the world."

The new resort will be fully developed and built by Miral. Disney and its legendary Imagineers will lead creative design and operational oversight to provide a world-class experience. Miral, which has developed a number of family entertainment destinations on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi in collaboration with American and European brands, will also operate the resort.

When Walt Disney opened Disneyland in Anaheim, California, on 17 July, 1955, he created a unique destination built around storytelling and immersive experiences, ushering in a new era of family entertainment. Seventy years later, Disney has grown into one of the world's leading providers of family travel and leisure experiences, with iconic businesses including six resort destinations: Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California; Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida; Tokyo Disneyland Resort; Disneyland Paris; Hong Kong Disneyland Resort; and Shanghai Disney Resort. These destinations encompass 12 theme parks and 57 resorts across three continents. Beyond theme parks, Disney Signature Experiences includes a top-rated cruise line with six ships and plans for seven more; a luxurious family beach resort in Hawaii; a popular vacation ownership programme; and an award-winning guided family adventure business. Disney's global consumer products operations include the world's leading licensing business; the world's largest children's publishing brands; one of the world's largest licensors of games across all platforms; Disney store locations around the world; and the Disney Store e-commerce platform.

'Disneyland Abu Dhabi will be authentically Disney and distinctly Emirati'

These experiences are created by Disney Imagineers, the creative force behind experiences found in Disney theme parks, resort hotels and cruise ships. Disney Experiences brings the magic of The Walt Disney Company's powerful brands and franchises — including Disney, Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars, ESPN, 20th Century Studios and National Geographic — into the daily lives of families and fans around the world to create magical memories that last a lifetime.

The Disney theme park and resort in Abu Dhabi will not only be Disney's seventh such complex worldwide, but it will also be the fifth theme park on the UAE capital's Yas Island. The island, which has become renowned for its oustanding entertainment options, is also home to Ferrari World, Yas Waterworld, Warner Bros. World and SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, all of which are also operated by Miral.

The new Abu Dhabi project is a major win not just for the city, and for the UAE, but for the entire Middle East and North Africa region, as it will undoubtedly draw in droves of eager fans from across the world.

"This is a thrilling moment for our company," said Robert A. Iger, Chief Executive Officer of The Walt Disney Company. "As our seventh theme park destination, it will rise from

ABOVE The announcement was witnessed by His Highness Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and attended by Robert A. Iger, CEO of The Walt Disney Company

BELOW The epic event had a star-studded line-up

ABOVE: The once-in-a-lifetime performance featuring a world-class lineup, including piano virtuoso Lang Lang, West End powerhouse Kerry Ellis, rising classical star Sonya Balsara, and beloved Emirati icon Rashed Alnuaimi

this land in spectacular fashion, blending contemporary architecture with cutting edge technology to offer guests deeply immersive entertainment experiences in unique and modern ways," he added, continuing: "Disneyland Abu Dhabi will be authentically Disney and distinctly Emirati – an oasis of extraordinary Disney entertainment at this crossroads of the world that will bring to life our timeless characters and stories in many new ways and will become a source of joy and inspiration for the people of this vast region to enjoy for generations to come."

With the UAE located within a four-hour flight of one-third of the world's population - making it a significant gateway for tourism - the new theme park is anticipated to draw in record numbers of visitors from both the region and the rest of the world. The UAE is also home to the largest global airline hub in the world, with 120 million passengers travelling through Abu Dhabi and Dubai each year, and with the country's - and region's - aviation industries only continuing to grow, the new theme park is also expected to be highly accessible. The development of this project will be a major boon to sustained economic growth in Abu Dhabi and beyond. Upon completion, the new theme park resort will offer signature Disney entertainment, themed accommodations, unique dining and retail experiences, and storytelling. in a way that celebrates both the heritage of Disney and the futuristic and cultural essence of Abu Dhabi. It's not only a win for the region, but one with significant potential for Disney as well.

"This groundbreaking resort destination represents a new frontier in theme park development," said Josh D'Amaro, Chairman, Disney Experiences. "Our resort in Abu Dhabi will be the most advanced and interactive destination in our portfolio. The location of our park is incredibly unique – anchored by a beautiful waterfront – which will allow us to tell our stories in completely new ways. This project will reach guests in a whole new part of the world, welcoming more families to experience Disney than ever before. Ultimately, it will be a celebration of what's possible when creativity and progress come together."

"Bringing a Disney theme park resort to Yas Island marks a historic milestone in our journey to further advance the island's position as a global destination for exceptional entertainment and leisure," said Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi, Group CEO, Miral. "Together, we are creating a place of boundless innovation, where the vision of our leadership continues to inspire the world." **BT**

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

Cosmic Influence

Is your next vacation written in the stars?

WORDS BY **YI-HWA HANNA**

IMAGE SIBERIANART/GETTY IMAGES

In recent years, astrotourism – travel associated with or centered around the night sky and celestial objects – has been on the rise. But now, a micro-trend is emerging within the niche, led by the power of the zodiac.

Once seen as a decidedly unscientific realm reserved mostly for hippies and tarot-toting believers in divination, in recent years, astrology has become mainstream. A growing number of people are turning to the stars for guidance on everything from their love lives to their jobs, with some using it almost daily. One study by EduBirdie found that 63% of young people claimed astrology had enhanced their career for the better, while a 2024 survey by The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice found that 61% of people feel astrology can provide comfort in uncertain times.

The shift has been quietly creeping up over the past decade: A 2014 study by the National Science Foundation in America noted a decreasing skepticism around astrology, reporting that more than 50% of 18-24 year-olds surveyed believed that astrology is scientific. It makes sense then that in 2025, the group most typically associated with belief in such cosmic influences is millennials – and within that, women tend to follow it more than men.

The advent of apps, too, has had an effect: It's easier than ever for people to check their horoscope daily; and social media, too, has an extraordinary amount of astrological content that only seems to be growing. One report by Astroyogi – which offers real-time consultation for its users – found that, among 500,000 people studied over a period of over six months two years ago – Gen Z users account for more than 60% of online astrology users. As an entire sector, the global astrology market is also experiencing a surge: in 2021, it was valued at US$12.7 billion, and by 2031, it is expected to reach a value of US$22.8 billion.

Tailored by the cosmos

For hotels looking to connect with younger audiences, or tap into the segment of wellness enthusiasts that enjoy such planetary enlightenment, it's a great way to enhance the offering. Last summer, the Nobu Hotel Santorini launched a "Holistic Astrology Retreat". Held in partnership with French perfume designer Veronique Gabai – who specialises in aromas inspired by the Mediterranean and the French Riviera – it allowed guests the chance to "explore the healing powers of scent and [their] surroundings, along with personalised well-being experiences according to each sign of the zodiac." Prices for the retreat started from US$3,909, and it encompassed three nights in a suite at the hotel (including breakfast), special gifts from the perfumer's range tailored to the guest's zodiac sign, a personalised in-room spa or massage treatment once again tailored to one's zodiac sign, and "astro sundowners" – cocktails or mocktails that are, you guessed it, tailored to each sign of the zodiac. It also came with one Omakase dinner for two at Nobu restaurant followed by a stargazing session, a hiking experience complete with a guided map and picnic, and one wine-tasting lunch experience for two at Sigalas Winery, about a 15-minute drive from the hotel.

→

IMAGE VIACHESLAV YAKOBCHUK/ADOBE STOCK

‘The package included a personalised city guide tailored to the guest’s star sign’

Nobu Hotel Santorini isn’t the only one to have introduced cosmic-themed beverages to its offering: in Saudi Arabia, the ultra-luxurious Nujuma, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve that opened in the stunning new Red Sea development in May 2024, also offers astrology-inspired drinks at its smart-casual lounge, Maia. The entire bar is astronomy-themed, complete with a celestial ceiling. If you’re craving more, you can also book in for one of the resort’s late-night stargazing sessions, during which you’ll not only have the chance to learn about the cosmos but you can also learn about Saudi’s take on astrology through its storytelling traditions. In the USA, The Memphian in southwest Tennessee – a city famed for its rock ‘n’ roll and blues scene – boasts a bar with an incredibly Instagrammable zodiac-themed ceiling. The hotel opened in 2021, and last year, it launched an astrology package for guests with zodiac-themed gifts, stargazing sessions on their rooftop, and the chance to sip on cosmic-themed drinks from the Tiger and Peacock lounge’s “Zodiac Cocktails” menu. Dara, a restaurant at Anantara Layan Phuket Resort, also offers zodiac-themed cocktails, along with a professional-grade telescope in its rooftop Sky Observatory upstairs. The venue invites guests to find their zodiac sign on an interactive chart at the entrance, before exploring a constellation-inspired drinks menu, and enjoying guided astronomy sessions when the night sky is suitable. At the property’s Layan Life Wellness centre, some offerings utilise Thai Traditional Medicine (TTM), along with Thai astrology and its Ayurveda-like principles to curate treatments around individual natal elements.

Over in Sydney, Australia, after opening in 2013, boutique hotel The Ultimo was described as the world’s first astrology-themed hotel. There, guests could receive daily horoscopes throughout the duration of their stay, and pad around their room with zodiac-themed slippers. They even had an in-house astrologer on hand. It may have been ahead of its time for celebrating astrology’s moment in the sun, but that theme’s appeal is on the verge of a renaissance – although now, the hotel is presented more as a historical legacy destination for its original use as a coachbuilder that was later transformed into a blacksmith’s establishment. Perhaps it was a little too far ahead of its time, since now, its website hardly reveals details of its formerly astrological appeal, that was once so buzzed about from its launch until around 2018. The Nusa Dua hotel in Bali, Indonesia, has also leaned heavily into its astrology-inspired ethos, with in-house experts that can tailor your itinerary to your zodiac sign since as early as 2019. Also found in Bali – and still going strong – The Mulia retreat hotel can do the same, elevating your stay based on the personality traits affiliated with your sign, and “tailor-making vacations to your cosmic essence.”

No modern wellness, holistic, or esoteric trend would be complete until it’s made an appearance in Los Angeles, and in 2020, this one did, when the W Los Angeles, in Beverly Hills launched a package called the Zodiac Guide to LA. The package included a personalised city guide, curated to suit the guest’s star sign, as well as a horoscope-themed sleep mask. It was lent credibility through a partnership with noted astrologer Susan Miller – the founder of Astrology Zone, who has a long list of high-

ABOVE: Stargazing and astrology typically go hand in hand
LEFT: Sound healing is found at many holistic retreats
OPPOSITE PAGE: Could astrocartography tell you your dream destination?

profile and celebrity clients. It wasn't Miller's first time collaborating with a hotel – in 2018, she had also had a five-day residency at the Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles, during which she provided extensive, detailed, one-on-one horoscope forecasts for private clients.

Mapped by the stars

The W Los Angeles wasn't the only Marriott property to get in on the astrological action. Last year, Moxy Hotels teamed up with Sanctuary – a digital astrology platform that provides users with interactive birth charts, daily horoscopes, and the chance to connect live and on-demand with experts for psychic or astrological readings and related advisories. Through the partnership, guests of any Moxy Hotels worldwide could utilise their "Cosmic Curations" offerings, wherein the app provided guests with personalised recommendations based on their astrocartography readings.

Astrocartography is a branch of astrology also known as locational astrology, that uses your individual birth chart – with the exact lines of the planets, star charts, and other celestial elements – to create a reading of the specific places where you can thrive in work or romance, or where you should travel or live. Once a planetarily-persuaded destination had been decided, a stay at a destined Moxy property could involve the chance to experience aura photography, indulge in sound baths, call in for dream interpretations and horoscopes, or sip on zodiac-inspired beverages.

Last autumn, The Standard London joined the horoscope club by launching their Zodiac Retreat, which once again tailors a programme for guests based on their individual star signs (from beauty treatments from Isamaya and bespoke massages to astrology and tarot reading cards). For the partnership, they've teamed up with a clairvoyant tarot reader and reiki healer known as Harriet and the Star. The Other House, in London's South Kensington area, also offers tarot card readings for guests, along with other astrology-related wellness programming, for which they've partnered with sound healing practitioner Lauren Raby.

To the moon and back

This month, Six Senses Crans-Montana is bringing this type of star power to the Swiss Alps through their Alma Frequency programme, held in collaboration with Anima. Running from 5 to 8 June, the event is bringing together a "hand-picked tribe of visionaries and pioneers in health and well-being", including breath expert James Nestor; "music-driven somatic expert" Taryn Toomey; gynecologist Dr. Jessica Shepherd, Jasmine Hemsley – an author celebrated for her writing on Ayurvedic principles; Luuk Melisse – founder of Sanctum, a movement that blends physical activity with spiritual reflection; and astrologer Rose Theodora. The latter will be hosting sessions focused on the themes of reconnection and spirit, through "sonic journeys, rituals of renewal, and an exploration of astrology and neuroscience." In addition to full access to the festival's exclusive sessions, guests can enjoy an all-inclusive three-night stay.

It isn't the first brand to offer guests a chance to blend the more esoteric side of astrology with science and astronomy – the Mountain Shadows resort in the southwestern US has been known to host stargazing sessions with qualified astronomy experts, which guests could enjoy with astrology-themed cocktails, during special occasions, like notable moon phases. Its location – with stunning views of Arizona's Camelback Mountain – makes for a beautiful way to enjoy the night sky, and the property is also taking advantage of this with a Desert Dreams package, inclusive of sound healing.

Some properties prefer to toe the line between astrology and astronomy, drawing in holistic horoscope enthusiasts and astrotourism fans alike through moon-based offerings. At the Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos, Pedrega, you can join their stargazing specialist to learn how to recognise constellations and learn about celestial-themed Mexican legends, while you tuck into churros, hot chocolate, coffee, and s'mores; while Sri Lanka's Cinnamon Tours offers the chance to enjoy a lunar ritual with a cacao ceremony under the night sky.

Whether you believe in astrology or think it's a load of hooey, as a growing amount of the highest-spending generations turn to the stars for guidance – and as astrotourism continues to rise in appeal, making room for sub-niches that help to keep the novelty factor alive – for savvy properties, tapping into this micro-trend could see a destiny tied to a new kind of fortune. **BT**

IMAGES **OSCARGUTZO/ADOBE STOCK; LIGHUEN DESANTO/ SIX SENSES**

SPONSORED CONTENT

Coming Up Roses

At the award-winning Rosewood Abu Dhabi, every guest feels like a VIP. We spoke to **Remus Palimaru**, the property's Managing Director, to learn how this property refines the art of hospitality

One of the hallmarks of the Rosewood brand is how residential it can feel – like a luxury home. What makes the suites a particularly good choice for that feeling?
At Rosewood Abu Dhabi, our suites are meticulously designed to embody the warmth and elegance of a private residence, offering an unparalleled sense of comfort and sophistication. Each suite features spacious layouts adorned with plush furnishings and expansive floor-to-ceiling windows that invite natural light, creating an inviting, airy ambiance. Thoughtful touches, such as carefully-curated artwork and dedicated butler service, ensure that every guest feels enveloped in a sense of belonging. The seamless integration of state-of-the-art technology, allowing effortless control of lighting and climate, further enhances the home-like experience, making our suites the perfect refuge for discerning travellers seeking both business efficiency and leisurely relaxation.

What makes the suites so unique?
The 41 suites at Rosewood Abu Dhabi, including the palatial Royal Suite, are exceptional for their expansive design, magnificent 360-degree views, and abundant natural light due to the floor-to-ceiling architecture. Custom furnishings, private gym and a neutral palette of the custom furnishings create a refined atmosphere, complemented by private dining areas, walk-in wardrobes, and marble-clad bathrooms with timeless deep soaking tubs. What sets them apart from other properties is their emphasis on privacy, comfort in a style you would want to create in your own home with the additional luxuries of a dedicated butler able to curate any bespoke experiences, such as timely drawing of the perfect bath soak or identifying your preferred pillow firmness and adds a mist that transforms your bedtime into a moment of zen.

Rosewood hotels tend to be highly influenced and inspired by the culture, history, and geography of each locale. How is this incorporated in Abu Dhabi?
We weave Emirati heritage into every facet of the guest experience, reflecting our A Sense of Place® philosophy. The hotel's architecture, inspired by the Arabian Gulf, features sleek lines and reflective surfaces. Inside, locally-inspired artwork and traditional Mashrabiya screens adorn public spaces and suites. Our culinary offerings, such as Majlis by Pierre Hermé, incorporate an exquisite specialty coffee programme in partnership with Espresso Lab - founded by Emirati entrepreneur, Ibrahim Al Mallouhi, - while curated experiences - such as private tours of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque or artisanal workshops with local craftsmen - immerse guests in Abu Dhabi's rich culture.

Tell us about the property's Manor Club Executive lounge.

This is a sophisticated space reserved for guests who seek an extra level of exclusivity and privacy. Enjoy your eggs benedict with a serving of caviar on top here, or allow us to shave some fresh white truffles on your scrambled eggs, while your pastries are the authentically-famous Pierre Hermé kind.

This exclusive retreat offers seamless private check-in, a curated selection of gourmet delicacies, and evening cocktails paired with exquisite canapés, all framed by breathtaking views of Al Maryah Island's skyline. If you feel the need to disconnect, why not play a game of pool? With private meeting spaces, high-speed WiFi, and concierge services, the lounge effortlessly blends refined leisure with unparalleled functionality for discerning traveller.

> "Business travellers prioritise efficiency, connecticity, and flexible workspaces"

What are some of the standout dining options at Rosewood Abu Dhabi?

Guests can embark on an exceptional culinary journey across our eight diverse dining venues, each offering a unique experience. At Majlis by Pierre Hermé, located in the Lobby Lounge, exquisite French pastries and expertly-brewed speciality coffee await. Dai Pai Dong serves award-winning Cantonese cuisine, perfect for a refined power lunch in a vibrant setting. As evening sets in, Hidden Bar invites guests to unwind with its collection of over 200 gins, while Dragon's Tooth offers an intimate speakeasy ambiance ideal for sophisticated networking. Wine connoisseurs will appreciate La Cava, our private wine lounge, known for its rare vintages and expertly curated tastings. Em Sherif Sea Café rounds out the experience with its vibrant Lebanese Mediterranean seafood dishes, celebrating the region's freshest flavours from land and sea. Each destination embodies our passion for culinary artistry and cultural richness.

You won the title of Best Business Hotel in Abu Dhabi at the *Business Traveller Middle East* Awards. Congratulations! What does this win mean to you?

Thank you! Winning this award is a tremendous honour and a testament to our team's dedication to redefining ultra-luxury hospitality. It validates our efforts to create a seamless experience for business travellers, from our prime location and state-of-the-art facilities to our personalised service and cultural immersion. This recognition inspires us to continue pushing boundaries and setting new benchmarks in Abu Dhabi's hospitality landscape.

What are the three key things every business traveller is now looking for?

Today's business traveller seeks convenience, connectivity, and personalisation. Convenience comes from a prime location, like our proximity to The Galleria Mall and Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, alongside efficient services like express check-in. Connectivity is critical, with high-speed WiFi, smart room technology, and flexible meeting spaces ensuring productivity. Personalisation, however, sets us apart - whether it's tailoring a suite to individual preferences or curating bespoke cultural experiences - we ensure every stay feels unique and memorable.

What's the biggest difference between the business traveller, the leisure traveller, and the bleisure traveller?

Business travellers prioritise efficiency, connectivity, and flexible workspaces, often balancing tight schedules with the need for comfort. Leisure travellers, conversely, seek immersive experiences, relaxation, and cultural exploration. The bleisure traveller bridges these worlds, blending work and leisure seamlessly. At Rosewood Abu Dhabi, we cater to bleisure travellers by offering productivity-focused amenities - like the Manor Club Executive Lounge - alongside enriching experiences, such as Sense Spa treatments or curated tours, ensuring they maximise both work and play.

You have ten event spaces – what kind of events can you host there?

Our eight versatile event spaces, spanning intimate boardrooms to grand ballrooms, accommodate a wide range of occasions. We host corporate events like high-level conferences, product launches, and executive retreats, leveraging advanced AV technology, and tailored catering. Additionally, we're a premier venue for social events, including weddings, gala dinners, and cultural celebrations, with bespoke décor and menus. Our dedicated events team ensures every gathering is flawlessly executed, regardless of scale.

What are your top picks at the spa?

For an unforgettable experience at Sense, A Rosewood Spa at Rosewood Abu Dhabi, I highly recommend the Sense Journeys. This bespoke wellness journey, infused with indigenous Arabian ingredients, offers a transformative escape, blending timeless rituals with luxurious relaxation to renew both body and soul, perfect for solo travellers or shared moments with loved ones.

A NEW WAVE OF SEAFARING TOURISM IS POURING INTO THE MIDDLE EAST, FROM CRUISES TO SUPERYACHTS AND BEYOND

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

All Aboard

Within the next three or four years, an epic nautical journey unlike any seen before will set sail on its maiden voyage - one that doesn't really have an end. Scheduled to depart from Monaco, the *Ulyssia* is a residential superyacht that will travel across the world with no end date in mind. The largest yacht in the world at 320m, it will be so much more than a boat, or even a home upon the water: it will be a world within itself, complete with its own luxury apartments, five-star amenities, a theatre, a health club, and even its own school, kids clubs, and a nightclub for the adults. The homes within it won't be available for an Airbnb-style holiday home rental by the average traveller - because this superyacht isn't one meant for a brief holiday period each year before its seafaring guests return home. It aims to actually be their home, one that they can live in year-round, as it travels across the world continuously, introducing them to different destinations and cultures along the way. Everything its residents might need will be found on board, whether that's medical care or education, world-class entertainment or health and wellness facilities, and the kind of dining options one won't tire of. All of this will fit into a space that's larger than the *Titanic* - but that, through a feat of clever design and engineering, doesn't look quite as immense as it truly is. From the outside, for instance, it will look like there's only one deck, when there are actually fifteen.

A WORLD UPON THE WATER

On-board the *Ulyssia* will be 133 residences and 22 guest suites. Prices run from upwards of US$10 million to $65 million and more, and the yacht itself is costing at least US$1.5 billion to build. The ship - which was named after Ulysses, the mythological Greek hero also known as Odysseus - is the vision of Swiss billionaire Frank Binder, a trained architect who is also the heir to the Merck pharmaceuticals empire. Binder hired naval architect Espen Øino's eponymous custom yacht studio to design *Ulyssia*, German shipbuilding company Meyer Werft to construct her, and a team that previously managed and operated The World - a Residences-at-Sea company that first set sail in 2002 - to run her. Given that The World is the largest (and only) private-owned residential yacht on Earth, and that it has visited more than 800 ports in around 140 countries since it first set sail, this team is truly the ideal counsel for the only project conceived thus far that could outshine it.

Construction for the *Ulyssia* begins this year, with completion expected by 2028 or 2029. In the UAE, the press announcement for her reveal was made at Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab, a hotel that is also inextricably tied to maritime life, given the fact that its design - dreamed up by renowned architect Shaun Killa - was inspired by an ultra-luxury yacht. Speaking at the private event, Binder shared that the *Ulyssia* had evolved out of his wish to have a place on a boat that travels the world constantly. "Instead of buying something somewhere, I found it far more interesting to build the whole thing. Since I'm an architect by education, this has been a passion project for me," he said. His vision, Binder shared, was "to create a unique lifestyle for a group of people who have the same ideas about travelling the world, getting to know the world, and having their home travel to the most remote and most exciting places, [without] having to pack and unpack." Binder explained that it makes for an excellent investment plan for the owners, with the "floating real estate" offering them more space than any land-based venture technically ever could. The units inside - with interiors by Italy's FM Architettura - will be furnished to give off the feeling of a five-star luxury hotel, but in this case, people will be buying it to share with family and friends, with its high level of exclusivity also part of the appeal. Residents can be transported to and from the boat via one of two on-board helicopters, which will also be used for "excursions to Antarctica or the jungle, or wherever we want to go." According to Renato W. Chizzola, *Ulyssia*'s COO - who brings decades of hospitality experience with him, including past roles as general manager of The World and Constance Hotels & Resorts, as well as senior positions at Cheval Blanc and Kerten Hospitality - many of the owners of Ulyssia's residences will also have their own yachts. "Yet they are not able to bring [them] to Antarctica. [In terms of] safety and security, it's logistically very complicated to operate in areas such as this. So every year, besides the regular itinerary, we will feature two expeditions: one in a cold area and one in a warm one." During these expeditions, Chizzola explains, there will be a team of experts on-board, who know everything there is about the fauna, flora, and culture of the places that the expeditation covers, offering the educated residents the chance to learn as well as discover.

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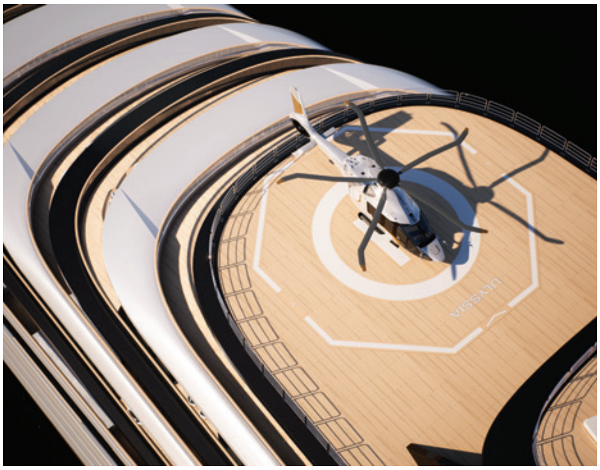


ABOVE FROM TOP A residence onboard the *Ulyssia*; the ship will have two helicopters in its garage.

BELOW The *Four Seasons I* is set to launch in 2026, with 11 restaurants aboard

For those who aren't part of the elite *Ulyssia* community, however, there are other options for a seafaring life that still allow you to discover more of the world in less time. The Middle East's yachting scene has experienced a boom in recent years, with the UAE boasting the highest number of superyachts owned in the Gulf region. The number of boat owners in the country is also on the rise - and from foreign waters, the number of yachts visiting the region is also on the up. During the 2023/2024 season, the number of yachts visiting the UAE increased by 12.28 per cent, and according to the firm that manages Dubai Harbour, it's busier than it's ever been. This year's Dubai International Boat Show - a prestigious annual event that showcases the very best in luxury yachts, cutting-edge marine technology, innovative watersports, and everything in between - drew in more than 30,000 visitors. The emirate currently has 3,600 berths across 15 marinas, with plenty more underway, set to reach a capacity to support 20,000 boat owners by 2025.

CRUISING INTO THE FUTURE

Yachts and superyachts aren't the only thing you'll find at the UAE's harbours and marinas: the country also has a burgeoning cruise scene. This April, Celestyal Cruises signed a three-year agreement with The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), to help promote the UAE capital as a key destination among Celestyal's guests. The award-winning Athens-operated company launched in the region in December 2024, and rapidly expanded its inaugural season in the Arabian Gulf due to popular demand. Celestyal will now return to the region with two ships in December this year, with three weekly calls to Abu Dhabi across the winter season until March 2026

Celestyal's shore excursion programme includes nine Abu Dhabi excursions, with half day tours taking in the best of Abu Dhabi, food and culture explorations, theme park visits, and VIP beach days, as well as the classic desert safaris and attractions. The recently refurbished 1,360-guest *Celestyal Discovery* will depart Athens on 28 November 2025, charting the same course with an additional call at Kusadasi, Türkiye, arriving for her maiden call into Abu Dhabi in December 2025. The ship will homeport from Abu Dhabi from 12 December 2025, and sail the three-, four- and seven-night 'Iconic Arabia' cruises. The three-night long weekend sailings will operate round-trip from Abu Dhabi, visiting Dubai and Sir Bani Yas Island for a combination of beach and wildlife safari experiences. The four-night midweek itineraries will sail round-trip from Abu Dhabi, calling at Doha, Ras Al Khaimah, and the coastal port of Khasab in Oman. Prices start from US$718 for two people on a three-night voyage, and US$918 for two people on a four-night cruise, with all meals, soft drinks, and wifi included. The cruise liner recently launched four new 14-night repositioning cruises as part of its winter sun season in the region, with sailings featuring two new countries for the brand, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and five maiden calls: Aqaba in Jordan, Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, Muscat in Oman, and Sharm El Sheikh and Ain Sukhna in Egypt. Crew members of any cruises passing through the UAE capital during these journeys can take advantage of DCT Abu Dhabi's Cruise Crew Pass: an exclusive discount programme launched in January 2024 that offers crew members discounts at retail, dining, and entertainment venues throughout the emirate for the joining fee of just US$1. When the pass first launched, Abu Dhabi already had a forecast 147 cruise calls to the city, with at least 500 to 100 crew members working aboard each ship.

In Saudi Arabia, the kingdom's first-ever cruise ship set sail on its maiden voyage - a three-night trip across the waters of the Red Sea - in December 2024. AROYA Cruises first launched in 2023 as a separate business unit of Cruise Saudi - a business fully-owned by the country's Public Investment Fund. Run independently out of Jeddah, it's described as the first Arabian cruise line, with a ship that's 335m long, with 1,678 cabins, and more than 1,600 crew members. On-board, there are 15 restaurants, 20 entertainment venues (including a theatre and a VR zone), exclusive women-only spaces, prayer rooms, a 1,603 sqm retail area, a 1,818 sqm wellness area, a 1,858 sqm kids zone, a VIP section with butler service, and even its own water park, with five slides and a kids' splash zone. Cabins come in interior, seaview, and balcony options, with villas, premium suites, and special needs cabins available. Currently, it travels to the Mediterranean,

The Middle East's yachting scene has experienced a boom in recent years, with the UAE boasting the highest number of superyachts owned in the Gulf region

with destinations including Istanbul, Bodrum, Souda Bay, Mykonos, Piraeus, Marmaris, Kusadasi, and Kas. Guests can also travel across the Red Sea, with destinations including Al Aqaba (Petra), Ain Al Sokhna (Cairo), Sharm El Sheikh, Jabal Al-Shabaya Island, and Safaga (Hurghada) - and soon, the company plans to expand its offering across the Arabian Gulf.

ABOVE-BOARD EXPERIENCES

Whether you're heading off on a grand cruise ship or on an ultra-elite yacht, travelling by sea doesn't just give guests the chance to experience multiple destinations in one journey, without having to repack their bags and move from hotel to hotel - it also offers the chance to see the world from a different perspective. Last month, for instance, *EXPLORA II* - the latest addition to Explora Journeys' ultra-elegant fleet - offered two-, three- and four-night stays during the Formula 1 Tag Heuer Grand Prix de Monaco 2025, giving guests the chance to not only experience the the thrill of the highly-anticipated race within luxury accommodations, but also with spectacular views and access to exclusive parties that they wouldn't have had elsewhere. Four Seasons Yachts - created by the team behind Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts - will launch its first yacht in 2026, and true to the brand's globally-renowned reputation for fine dining excellence, the *Four Seasons I* will offer 11 exceptional restaurant and bar concepts on-board. With Istanbul's Galataport being the world's first and only underground curise terminal, Türkiye's national flag carrier, Turkish Airlines, has collaborated with the award-winning port to increase tourism to the country by both land and sea; while this March, Wego, the leading travel app and largest online travel marketplace in the MENA region, partnered with Waves, an innovative experience app that will easily connect its users with luxury yachts and chalets. The goal of the partnership was to enhance Wego's offering by providing travellers with premium maritime experiences across Dubai, Kuwait, Jeddah, and Qatar, and this enables Wego users to book private yacht trips ranging from two to six hours, accommodating up to 25 guests, for everything from coastal escapes and adventure-filled water activities, to exclusive celebrations.

With modern life feeling increasingly fast-paced, the idea of an all-inclusive vacation that allows you to truly switch off - while helping you tick as many places as possible off your bucket list - has a growing number of savvy travellers turning to the ocean for their next dream trip. As seafaring tourism options continue to evolve - supported by improved technology that enabling smoother journeys and more entertaining surrounds - from yachts to cruises, modern maritime travel could truly help you make the world your oyster. **BT**

ABOVE
A cruise ship docked at Abu Dhabi Cruise Terminal

BELOW
A deck on the *Ulyssia*

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

ON THE RUNWAY

AVIATION AND GLAMOUR HAVE ALWAYS GONE HAND IN HAND. HERE, WE CHART THE EVOLUTION OF INFLIGHT FASHION

WORDS **ALICE HENDERSON AND YI-HWA HANNA**

IMAGE SVITLANA/ADOBE STOCK

Stylish ensembles of slanted lapels and silky neck ties parade down a carpeted aisle. Some are finished with gilt buttons, others with a shiny brooch. A deft hand has moulded each outfit to its wearer: darts and seams are exact, and cuffs sit neatly around wrists. These garments are the work of expert fashion designers, but instead of heading down a catwalk, they debut at 35,000 feet.

Travel by plane today and you could be in the presence of some of fashion's best talent, with cabin crew done-up in Vivienne Westwood, Pierre Balmain or with tailoring by Savile Row's Ozwald Boateng – but why is fashion and aviation so entwined?

ALTITUDE WITH ATTITUDE

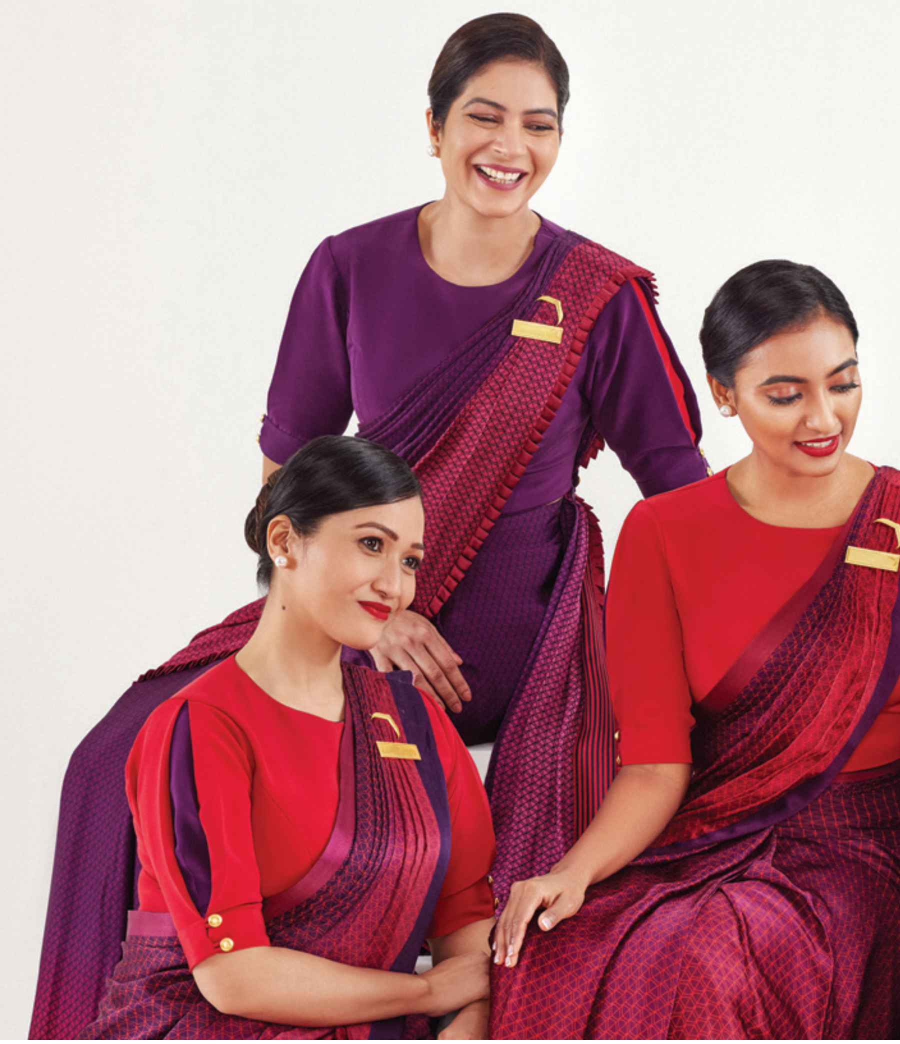
Turning the aisle into the FROW (the prestigious front row at fashion shows) is nothing new. Airlines have been working with fashion houses since the 1950s. Part of the reason stems from the romance of the Golden Age of travel. Working as an air stewardess (as they were called at the time) was considered an impossibly glamorous profession – so, naturally, the outfits had to match.

Air France was the first to put its fashion foot forward. Parisian fashion house, Georgette de Trèze, created a brand new uniform for the Air France crew in 1951. Inspired by Christian Dior's 1947 New Look collection, the fresh ensemble had a nipped waist and form-fitting skirt, which was revolutionary at the time for its celebration of femininity.

Pan Am attendants also got a glamorous wardrobe update in 1959 from famed Beverly Hills couturier Don Loper. The sharp-shouldered military styles were replaced with a fitted jacket and cropped sleeves that revealed the wrist.

Of course, there was a reason why airlines were prepared to invest huge sums of money in dressing their cabin crew in the latest threads. What could be better marketing than these stylish, smiling ambassadors? As travel ramped up during the 60s and 70s, airlines increasingly looked for ways to distinguish themselves.

United Airlines, for example, turned to Hollywood costumer Jean Louis in 1968 for a uniform revamp. It was the first time the carrier had worked with a top designer, and was the largest contract awarded in the airline industry to date at US$3 million. Under Louis' direction, hemlines were brought up and a variety of fun-coloured A-line dresses were issued. The coral-red "Hawaiian Sunset" dress featured in a number of amusing advertising campaigns – with flight attendants playing golf and even surfing in the short orange number.



ABOVE: In 2023, Air India unveiled a brand-new collection of uniforms for its cabin and cockpit crew, designed by Indian celebrity couturier Manish Malhotra - intended to blend rich Indian heritage with 21st-century style.

IMAGE **COURTESY OF AIR INDIA**

Air France upped its game once again, commissioning Spanish designer Cristobal Balenciaga for a new uniform in 1969. Like sugar plum fairies, its team emerged in pastel shades with a silky ribbon (known as a hatter's tie) fastened in a bow at their neck. An alternative navy suit for winter came with a stylish bomber jacket, hat and headscarf.

Male uniforms however remained much the same: double-breasted and rigid. Airlines had worked out that it was the female attendants who had the most star power, and focused their efforts accordingly.

BEAUTY STANDARDS

Of course, there was much more to the presentation of cabin crew than their clothing. In 1936, *The New York Times* painted the ideal air hostess as: "Petite; weight 100 to 118 pounds; height 5 feet to 5 feet 4 inches; age 20 to 26 years."

Trainee air hostesses were put through their paces

CASUAL COOL?

The sneakers vs. pumps debate

In 2025, ahead of Korean Air's takeover of Asiana Airlines - which may lead to a potential uniform update - female cabin crew members for the airline have been campaigning for more comfort in their outfits. At the heart of their demands is a request for different footwear: they've been asking for the chance to wear sneakers. The latter was once allowed, along with jeans, on fellow Korean Air-founded budget airline Jin Air (in 2008), but 11 years later (in 2019) the carrier reverted to business-style uniforms and dress shoes.

BELOW: A model wears British Airways' uniform with a hijab in 2023

at airline school. On the agenda were posture and make-up lessons, alongside learning how to serve drinks and deal with inebriated passengers. Some carriers even required women to pass a personality test – peppy, educated candidates were preferred.

Standards didn't let up once you were hired: weigh-ins were carried out routinely, and archive images from McConnell Air Hostess School, which trained hostesses for TWA in the 40s, show ladies chewing gum to reduce their double chin.

FUNCTIONAL FASHION

In 1978, airlines were deregulated, meaning carriers were free to offer lower, more competitive fares and relax their marketing campaigns. Female flight attendants were off the hook, and uniform designs became more sensible and practical.

Amy Seadon, head of collections, learning and interpretation at Aerospace Bristol, who worked on the recent *The Fashion of Flight* exhibition, explained that in the 1980s, airlines such as British Airways "wanted uniforms to be as easy to look after and as easy to wear as they could, as well as being fashionable at the time."

gettyimages
Credit: CSA Images

Synthetic materials that were easy to care for were chosen over natural fibres. Outfits still moved with the times though: shoulder pads and big ties were rife in the 80s.

Collaborations with fashion designers have also continued, from the classic military ensemble Julien Macdonald created for BA in 2004 to the latest British Airways outfits from Savile Row tailor Ozwald Boateng.

But if the 60s were all about glamour, then the 2020s are a time for functionality. (Love it or hate it, athleisure has influenced airline fashion.) Increasingly, airlines are considering their crews' comfort as well as style. Female cabin crew at airlines such as Bangkok Airways, ITA Airways, KLM and Japan Airlines can now opt to wear trousers over a skirt, and KLM updated its policy in 2024 to allow staff to wear specially designed trainers by Dutch footwear brand Filling Pieces. Delta meanwhile has released a modern set of uniform prototypes with GPS Apparel, a division under high-street brand Gap Inc.

British Airways' new uniform also offers female staffers trousers and a stylish jumpsuit among an expansive collection of 96 individual pieces.

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IMAGES COURTESY OF BRITISH AIRWAYS; CSA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Virgin Atlantic is a trailblazer in the modern fashion scene of airlines, and an advocate for individuality at work. In 2022, it became the first UK carrier to allow cabin crew to show tattoos (previously airlines had only hired those who could conceal ink under clothing) and launched a gender-neutral uniform policy. Under the new rule book, crew members can choose whichever uniform version they feel most comfortable in, no matter their gender identity. Crew now have the option of a dramatic red two-piece designed by Dame Vivienne Westwood, complete with a rippling frill-front shirt, or a burgundy suit. All Westwood garments also feature a small hand-drawn wing.

Nichola Feakins, uniforms manager at Virgin Atlantic, said: "Diversity is something we really want to champion at Virgin Atlantic. [The gender-neutral uniform rules] bring a sense of belonging and inclusion, and connect people with our brand... We are now able to recruit from a wider pool and have some fantastic people that come and work for us."

She continued: "I think the passengers have welcomed it with open arms. It brings a sense of inclusivity, not just for our wearers, but for our passengers. They feel like they can be themselves... Everyone is welcome onboard."

For other airlines, consistency is key. Singapore Airlines' uniform is a shining reminder of the past, with the carrier famously sending cabin crew out in a graceful sarong kebaya. The design is recognisable for its use of traditional Asian Batik and classic shape, and comes in four colours for each rank of the female crew. The eye-catching look has been around since 1974, when it was adapted by Parisian couturier Pierre Balmain. Emirates too, have retained a classic style for the last 15 years – designed by Simon Jersey with the shade of warm sand and the iconic sashed hat.

STYLE CONSCIOUS

Another factor influencing fashion design today is sustainability. For Virgin, this means recycling discarded garments down to the threads, and reusing items like handbags and hats that are still in good condition. The current Vivienne Westwood uniform is in fact made from 25% recycled plastics, and a nanotechnology is used in the fabric to ensure a long lifespan.

> 'They bring a sense of belonging and inclusion'

FROM TOP: Etihad's 2021 Formula 1 uniform, designed by Emirati fashion designer Yara bin Shakar; A new pilot uniform for Air New Zealand, by Kiwi designer Emilia Wickstead

IMAGES ETIHAD AIRWAYS MEDIA CENTRE; DEREK HENDERSON FOR AIR NEW ZEALAND

ABOVE: Emirates debuted a stylish new uniform for its elite Premium & VIP Passenger Services team in January 2025

IMAGE EMIRATES MEDIA CENTRE

Many other carriers are also now looking at sustainable fabrics and production. In January 2024, Brussels Airlines unveiled new uniforms, which included unisex pieces and trainers from brands including Atelier Content and Ambiorix, with sustainable credentials including BCI-certified cotton, mulesing free wool, and vegan leather shoes made from cacti and grapes. Meanwhile, Aerolíneas Argentinas created a slimline six-piece range (down from nine) in its new collection from Benito Fernandez – which also featured Spandex for extra comfort.

CONTROVERSIAL FASHION

With so many changes, there were bound to be some hiccups. In June 2018, Delta released a set of new, plum-coloured uniforms designed by Project Runway star Zac Posen and manufactured by Lands' End. But just a year later, some female flight attendants began reporting serious reactions to their clothing – including skin rashes, shortness of breath, headaches and fatigue. Doctors who treated those affected said that chemicals used to make the garments stain resistant were the likely cause of their illnesses. Needless to say, the uniform was discarded.

British Airways also fell subject to criticism for its uniform last year. The Ozwald Boateng collection originally included shirts for female attendants made from a fabric so sheer that the airline issued its staff guidance on what underwear to wear. After much backlash, British Airways quickly told employees that it was exploring new fabric options, and that

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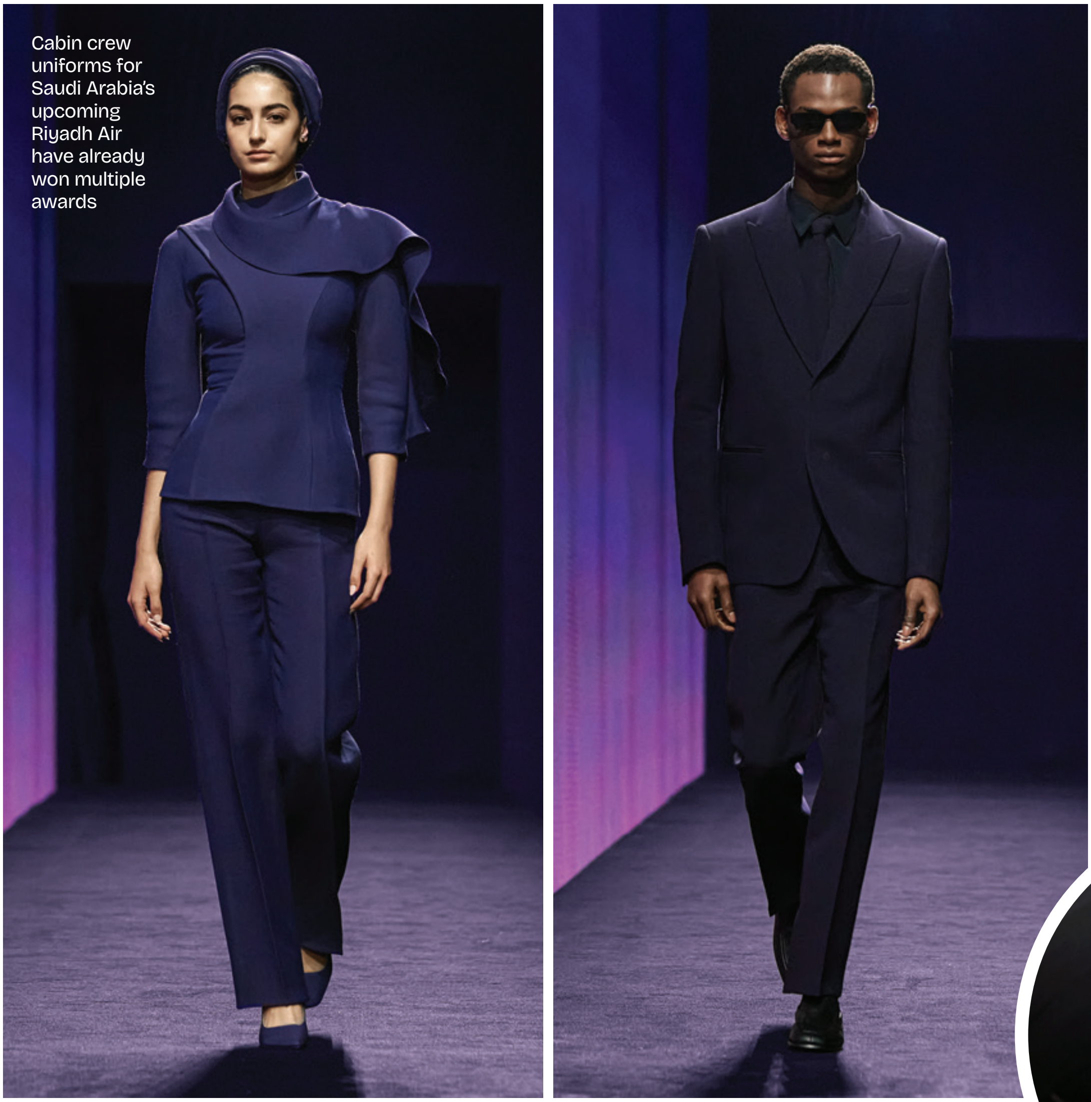
‘Uniforms are both a product of their time and a nifty promotional tool’



Cabin crew uniforms for Saudi Arabia’s upcoming Riyadh Air have already won multiple awards

→ the new blouse would be at least 43% thicker than the initial model.

RUNWAY TO RUNWAY

The interplay between airlines and the fashion industry has even moved beyond the plane. Saudi Arabian carrier Riyadh Air actually unveiled its uniform (or, should we say, collection) during the Paris Couture Week in 2024. Models swept down a runway in indigo pieces, donning dark sunglasses and handbags to complete the look.

Lufthansa has also blurred the worlds of flight and fashion. The German airline staged a pop-up event in London in November 2024 under the name Unhide/New Worlds of Fashion, with six pieces from designers in Johannesburg, São Paulo and Bengaluru.

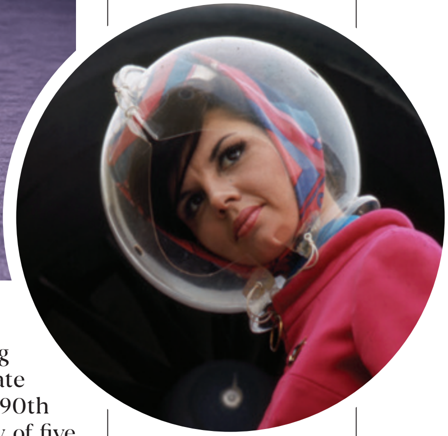
Fashion revivals are also becoming an important way for airlines to celebrate their heritage: Air France celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2023 by putting on a display of five original, conceptual outfits at Galeries Lafayette in Paris, which were inspired by different elements of the airline. Virgin Atlantic had a similar idea, releasing an archive collection and photoshoot of the past crimson uniforms in 2024, in fitting commemoration of its Ruby Anniversary.

It’s clear that uniforms are both a reflection of their time and a nifty promotional tool. As airlines continue to compete and push boundaries, who knows what creative collaborations we’ll see in future. One thing’s for sure though: the sky’s the limit. **BT**

FASHION FAUX-PAS

Braniff Airways' bubble helmet

Astronaut helmet? Diving gear? Think again. This bubble helmet is the work of Italian fashion designer Emilio Pucci, which he devised for the now defunct Braniff Airways in the mid-1960s. Made of plastic, the see-through bonnet protected stylish hairdos while cabin crew waited to board. Reportedly, stewardesses complained that it was difficult to hear anyone while wearing the fish-bowl contraption.



IMAGES COURTESY OF RIYADH AIR; AIRANDSPACE.SI.EDU MULTIMEDIA GALLERY

Good Scents

Ever wondered why your favourite hotels smell so incredible? It's all by design – and clever scent marketing can help to ensure that your most stellar holiday memories last long after you depart

WORDS BY **YI-HWA HANNA**

IMAGE **GITUSIK/ADOBE STOCK**

Unless you've been living under a rock for the past 25 years, you're probably familiar with the phrase "new car smell". A combination of gases and chemicals emitted from the leather, plastics, and other textiles that are put together to make the mighty automobile, the blended aroma of adhesives, sealants, gasoline, coolants, burning rubber, and various other man-made compounds may not sound very appealing, but to many people, the scent is intoxicating. So much so, in fact, that companies not only bottle and sell it, but car manufacturers even employ specific staff as odour experts to ensure that their vehicles come with that specific whiff. It's a scent we associate with luxury, after all: the ability to be able to purchase a new car, and the joy of being able to drive a sleek, powerful machine.

Smell is a powerful thing. There's an entire psychology around it, with scent linked to everything from our memory to our emotions, and in some cases, even our cognition. It has the ability to affect everything from our mood to the way we feel about certain things, and even induce physical reactions. In simple science-related terms, when we sniff a scent, it's taken in by a structure in the front of the brain called the olfactory bulb. Odours travel to the limbic system – a part of the brain jam-packed with nerves and other networks, that contains structures such as the amygdala and the hippocampus. It is here that the human brain processes emotion and memory; the autonomic nervous system. It's where we feel fear, pleasure, or anger, or feel compelled by the drive for hunger, procreation, power, nurturing, and more.

SCENT-SATIONAL
From bath-and-body lines to home fragrance devices, hotels' scent branding can offer priceless benefits

The scent of a burning building, for instance, is one that humans are wired to sense danger from on a primal, evolutionary basis. The smell of food, from freshly baked bread to grilled meat, rouses our hunger, while pheromones have much more control over our attraction (or repulsion) from potential significant others than we might like to admit.

So it's little wonder, then, that hotels – key centres of memory-making experiences, luxuriating comforts, and the

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‘The scent [is] a sensory voyage that mirrors the journey of sea and soul that the hotel represents’

ABOVE: Guests are greeted with Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab’s custom scent, Marsa Breeze, the moment they step into the hotel lobby

RIGHT: Mama Shelter’s Medaillon fragrance was created by the hotel brand’s founders

IMAGE **JUMEIRAH MARSA AL ARAB**

things in life that make us feel more alive – have also cottoned on to the irrefutable power of scent.

In 2025, scent marketing can make for big business. A marketing technique that utilises the sensory element of smell to help create a distinct link between a brand and its customers, it can establish a sense of emotional connection, brand loyalty, and experiential value, as well as a powerful identity that is felt as much as seen. It’s a technique that Hyatt Hotels has been using for almost two decades. In 2007, the company released a custom fragrance called *Seamless*, bearing the scent of blueberries and delicate florals. Since then, Hyatt has expanded its scent branding portfolio, with Seamless being used in more than 300 of its properties in the United States – alongside a whole range of other fragrances for properties including Hyatt House, Hyatt Place, Park Hyatt, Andaz, and Grand Hyatt. Some of its brands even use unique blends for each different destination of their hotels.

Hotel fragrances are typically created by companies specialising in “scent solutions”, such as Air Aroma. The Australian agency has worked with many of the biggest brands worldwide, from the Barry’s fitness chain and Dom Pérignon to Nissan, Cathay Pacific, Louis Vuitton, and Hugo Boss. Its hotel client portfolio reads like a list of all-stars, with brands including The Langham Hotels, The Ritz-Carlton, Fairmont, SLS Hotels & Residences, The Lana, Standard Hotels, Sofitel, SIXTY Hotels, Atlantis Paradise Island, and even Virgin Voyages. If you walk into The Lana - Dorchester Collection in Dubai, you’ll catch a whiff of its unique creation by Air Aroma, containing a blend of bergamot, jasmine, and sea salt that beautifully complements the sense of elegant quiet luxury at its stunning waterfront location.

French brand Mama Shelter decided to take a different route by creating their own fragrance rather than outsourcing it. The blend of cedar, vanilla, amber, mahogany wood, and musk was created by its founders, Serge Trigano, Jérémie Trigano, and Benjamin Trigano, to evoke the same sense of warmth and intimacy that the urban refuge aims to drive home. Named *Medaillon*, you can smell it as you walk through the hallways of Mama Shelter Dubai - and the home fragrance is available to purchase on the global Mama Shelter website for €35.

A SONG FOR THE SENSES

Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab – an architectural masterpiece designed by Shaun Killa, found on Dubai’s most coveted strip of beach – seduces guests the moment they walk in through *Marsa Breeze*, its bespoke fragrance that blends top notes of black pepper and clove, heart notes of cedarwood, sea salt, and patchouli, and base notes of oak, amber wood, and marine steam. The scent was designed to be a sensory voyage that mirrors the journey of sea and soul that the hotel – the final chapter in Jumeirah’s nautical trilogy – represents. Serene yet vibrant, it was crafted to be a meeting of salt and land, featuring elements of tradition and modern allure while evoking images of mist rising above the water, the effortless rhythm of coastal living, and sunlit marinas with timeless maritime charm.

“*Marsa Breeze* captures the spirit of Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab – a distinctive fragrance that brings to life a sense of discovery, effortless elegance, and the calming rhythm of the sea. It’s a signature scent guests experience the moment they arrive, subtly weaving its way through their stay and leaving a lasting impression. By connecting scent with memory, it reflects our passion for creating meaningful, multi-sensory experiences and a truly unique lifestyle destination that speaks to all five senses,” says Harun Dursun, Managing Director of Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab. The fragrance is not available for purchase, mirroring the hotel’s sense of exclusivity even further.

EMAAR’s Vida and Address hotels have also invested in custom scents. Vida Hotels & Resorts’ signature *Zen* fragrance is available in the form of reed diffusers and candles that can be purchased at its properties. The Address, meanwhile, worked with Middle Eastern scent-marketing leader Rezaroma to create two vetiver and cedar-based fragrances, one of which leans more heavily into the region’s beloved oud profiles, and another that has a marine twist. Those wishing to take home a reed diffuser as a souvenir can ask about it at the on-property spa. This summer, The Address Sky View is utilising the appeal of perfume in another creative way: by teaming up with renowned UAE-founded perfume house KAYALI for a unique poolside offering inspired by KAYALI’s *Vacay in a Bottle* series. The takeover of the poolside venue Alto 54 – which launched on 20 May and will run until 19 June – allows guests to trial the scents through sensory pods, snag surprise samples from a perfume vending machine, swim alongside KAYALI bottle-shaped pool floaties, and dine on meals inspired by the limited-edition collections, with the retreat separated into zones inspired by each scent.

Another iconic brand from the Far East, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, hired iconic perfume brand Le Labo to come up with their signature scent. *The Essence of Shangri-La* can be purchased in various forms through Shangri-La's online boutique, including an essential oil roll-on with an intoxicating blend of bergamot, palma rosa, lavender, and orange. Two years ago, the Singapore-founded hotel brand asked celebrity perfumer Jo Malone to create a bespoke fragrance blend for a unique offering at one of their Middle Eastern properties: Scented Memories by Jo Loves, Shangri-La, and Jo Malone CBE at Shangri-La Al Husn. The experience included a three-night stay at the beachfront Oman property, a luxury gift set (including a 110ml bottle of the fragrance, a body cream, and a scented candle), gourmet meals, a couple's spa treatment (utilising products with the same scent), a complimentary cocktail inspired by the fragrance, and more.

A number of Marriott's hotel brands have also collaborated with renowned perfumers for their own creations. Its Luxury Collection hotels, for instance, collaborated with Byredo to create their own scent called *Le Chemin* (available in the form of a shampoo, conditioner, body wash, lotion, and bath soap). For its *Purple Water* bath-and-body line, The Ritz-Carlton worked with Asprey, while JW Marriott Hotels has partnered with Aromatherapy Associates to come up with a range of special skincare and haircare products.

Across the rest of Marriott International's portfolio of brands, you'll find an equally-diverse selection of custom olfactory offerings. Its Design Hotels have collaborated with individual scent designers to create profiles as unique as each property: MUSA – a sleek and airy beachside escape – boasts a signature fragrance by perfumer Izaskun Diaz that pays homage to its location near Zihuatanejo, Mexico, where beach, jungle, and a saltwater lagoon come together. Design Hotels collaborated with Swiss brand Soeder to create the limited-edition *Mystic Journey* scented shampoo, conditioner, soap, and lotion for the Cervo Mountain Resort in Zermatt, all of which can be purchased on-property or in Soeder's flagship store in Zurich. Nobis Hotel Palma in Spain has *Hadiqa*, created with Spanish perfumer Viti Vici; Immerso Hotel in Portugal's has *Oceanique*, created with the only Portuguese member of the International Society of Perfumer-Creators Lourenço Lucena; and The Bank Hotel Istanbul worked with Froma Fragrances & Flavors and Scento to create a different scent for every corner of the property.

Fans of Marriott's other brands' fragrances can purchase many of them through the Marriott Bonvoy Boutiques website, in the form of room sprays, candles, bath bombs, soaps, reed diffusers, shower products, and potpourri. There, you'll find The Westin's *White Tea* fragrance, the EDITION Hotels' *The EDITION* fragrance (created by Le Labo), Renaissance Hotels' *Shiso Tea* scent, and St. Regis Hotels & Resorts's *Caroline's Four Hundred* – the name of which pays homage to Caroline Astor, of the St. Regis's founding family, developed by olfactory expert Carlos Huber's ARQUISITE Parfumeur. You'll also find Marriott's own *Attune* fragrance, which comes in the form of a deep sleep pillow spray, electronic diffuser spray, and fragrance oil, among others.

With scent's ability to trigger a significant emotional response that activates our brain's memory centres, it can be a powerful way to take us back to a specific time and place. So the next time you wish a specific trip or hotel stay could last forever – or maybe just hope to take a piece of the luxury home with you – why not consider its fragrance? It could be just the trick for transporting you to your favourite property before you can visit again in person. **BT**

A NOSE FOR EXCELLENCE

For a savvy "nose" – an industry term used for a perfumer that has trained their exceptional sense of smell for many years, to understand the unique alchemy of how different ingredients work together to create incredible blends – working with a hotel brand can provide a truly special challenge with epic rewards. In 2020, scent designer Johanna Monange – who has created perfumes for globally-noted fragrance houses and designer brands, from Firmenich to Lancôme, Armani, Paco Rabanne, and YSL (including some of their most iconic scents) – founded her own agency, Maison 21G Paris. Her creations now dominate some of the top luxury hotels in East Asia, with her client list including the Mandarin Oriental; Raffles Sentosa Singapore; Marina Bay Sands; Bawah Reserve; Resorts World Sentosa; Kimpton Hotel Aqeos Hainan | Clear Water Bay; and World of Hyatt. She's also created a custom fragrance for Maison Revka Restaurant and Beach Club, and Dubai's Gigi Rigolatto Beach Club and Restaurant.

Mama loves you
Mama loves you

IMAGE **MAMA SHELTER**

SEA CHANGE

Istanbul's Golden Horn is one of the city's most historically-rich areas - and a major new project is giving it a new lease of life

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

A change is brewing at the Golden Horn. Once a bustling hive of activity during various periods of Türkiye's past, this horn-shaped inlet flows off the Bosphorus. Like the equally-iconic Galata Bridge, which separates it from the more commonly-visited parts of the city of Istanbul, it is a world between worlds. In fact, the history of the two is deeply intertwined. The bridge - named after Galata, the former name of the Turkish capital's waterside Karaköy neighbourhood - has existed in some form since the 6th century, and by 1453, prior to the fall of Constantinople, a mobile bridge was put together using a series of ships placed side-by-side, to enable Turkish troops to move across the Golden Horn, from one side of the land to the other. Over the decades that followed, plans for a more permanent bridge were upheld with multiple grand visions, including proposed designs by legendary artists Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo - both of which were ultimately rejected. It has been constructed out of wood, resting on pontoons, as a floating bridge, then steel and concrete. It has borne the inscriptions of poets, been featured in various forms of literature and theatre, and credited as a vital centre for the development of modern Turkish rock music, and it has suffered from fires, bombings, towings, and more. The version that travellers and locals alike can travel across today is its fifth

IMAGE **MUSTAFA SEVEN**

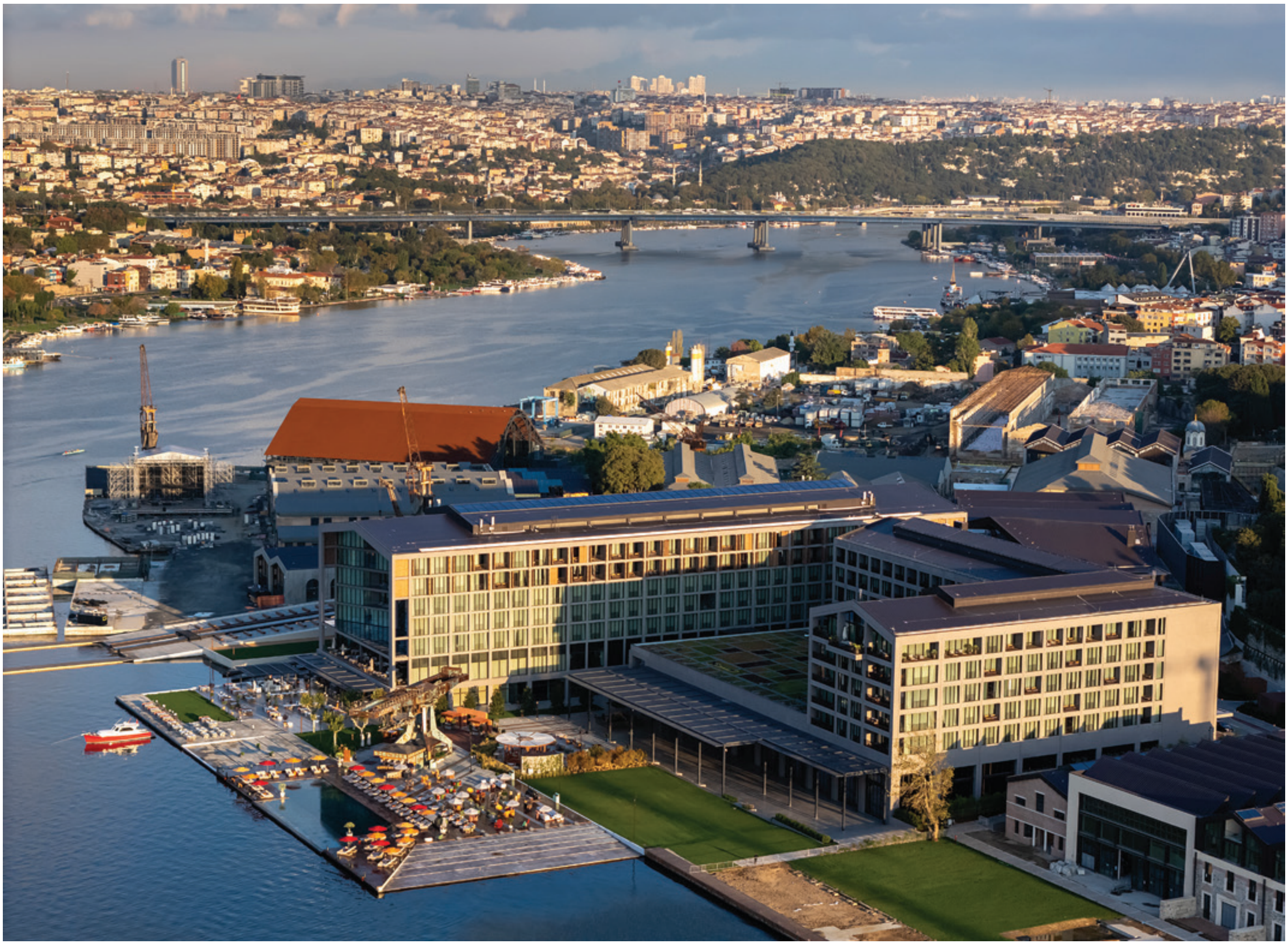
iteration - and in every instance, the bridge has remained a symbol of the link between worlds and cultures. It is what separates - and brings together - East and West; the religious and the secular; the old and the new; and all of the different cultures that it connects. And the Golden Horn itself - this estuary that turns as golden as its name suggests when it is soaked in the glow of the setting sun - has long done the same.

Galata Bridge is but one of four bridges that cross the Golden Horn. Experts have found evidence of urban life around the area since as far back as the 7th century BC, and since the times of Byzantium, the Golden Horn has been a major strategic centre for trade and military advantage, and a catalyst for growth. It has witnessed Crusaders and the Siege of Constantinople, Ottoman conquests, and the resettlement of various ethnic groups. And despite its major historical significance, by the 1980s, this centre of immense history was mostly forgotten, left to suffer from industrial waste pollution being spewed by the many factories, warehouses, and shipyards that had been built along its shores over time. While the rest of Istanbul grew in global tourist appeal, the Golden Horn's once-mighty past bore only a whisper of its once-tremendous history. Until now.

ABOVE The Tersane Istanbul complex offers a stunning view of Istanbul's historic skyline

A RISING TIDE TO LIFT ALL SHIPS

The Golden Horn's once-thriving Ottoman naval shipyards lay forgotten for decades, hidden from public view for almost six centuries - until several years ago, when a major restoration →



ABOVE Stage one of the Tersane Istanbul project is already open, with Rixos Tersane Istanbul at its heart - with the entire complex to be completed by 2027

IMAGE **RIXOS TERSANE ISTANBUL**

project of this historically-rich area began to take shape. A new urban development called Tersane Istanbul is reimagining this once-thriving commercial hub for a new era, transforming it into a vibrant centre that has equal parts modern appeal and historical conservation. This contemporary integrated urban development project is intended to honour the city's legendary past through this deeply significant area, by not only restoring parts of it to its former glory, but also translating its appeal for a new generation that will last for decades to come.

> 'The Golden Horn's once-mighty past bore only a whisper of its once-tremendous history, until now'

ALL HANDS ON DECK

Parts of Tersane Istanbul are already up and running, with the first being a hotel that is part hospitality offering and part heritage monument. Rixos Tersane Istanbul opened its doors in early September 2024, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan present at its inauguration. The property has 432 rooms, including 57 suites with waterfront views, and has now become the flagship property of the Rixos Group - which has investments in eight countries across three continents.

Inspired by the historical significance of the 600-year-old dockyard it is constructed in - the name "Tersane" actually means "shipyard" in Turkish - its interiors are heavily influenced by its history, culture, and art. The hotel has curated a special art collection under the theme of cultural sustainability, featuring contemporary artworks by both local and international artists, accompanied by a catalog and digital archive. It offers multiple dining options that promise exceptional gastronomical experiences, as well as a wide range of sports and wellness activities to relax the mind and body. It also features an infinity pool with a unique view of the Golden Horn, as well as a one-of-a-kind cigar lounge. The hotel's views, which surround the historic peninsula, are already making it a major attraction for both local and international tourists – and the property is also accessible by sea. Cruise ships, yachts, and smaller boats that can ferry people across the water and to parts of town much further afield can all be accessed from the hotel's docks, helping them not only beat the traffic but also see this illustrious city from an entirely new point of view. As a bonus, soon guests from abroad will be able to be ferried there from the airport, beating Istanbul's sometimes notorious traffic problem.

The property also has quite a large capacity for events both small and large, the latter of which can be held in its grand Tersane Ballroom and the Tersane Istanbul Event Hall. In fact, it's already begun hosting these, having held culturally-impactful events from fashion shows to music performances by world-famous DJs within the first nine months of its life already.

The hotel's lobby has been designed to look like a cruise ship, and an incredibly sophisticated, luxurious one at that. Inside its elegant ground-floor fine dining restaurant, Josephine Istanbul - which boasts stunning views of the Golden Horn that beg to be viewed at every time of day - guests will find a series

LEFT The colourful Balat neighbourhood, Istanbul

of historical artefacts from the area's sea-faring past, from old captain's logs to vintage pipes and more. Towering above them, suspended from its impressively high ceilings, are some of the country's first-ever racing boats - one of which is still used from time to time today, when it's not decorating the restaurant.

PLAIN SAILING

The waters surrounding the hotel are smooth and ideal for water-borne activities such as rowing, and guests can see rowing clubs, yacht enthusiasts, and someday maybe even stand-up paddleboarders making the most of it. As such, the area has also played host to various festivals and other events combining both sport and nature, as well as arts, culture, and history. Istanbul's biggest art fair, Contemporary Istanbul, has been taking place for multiple years, and chose the Tersane Istanbul area as its new venue in October 2021 - and it will continue to be held here in the years to come. The hotel boasts easy accessibility to the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, with the swanky Galataport complex (and its many lush shops and waterfront dining venues) just a 15-20 minute boat ride away - and in time, two more museums will be opening up within the Tersane Istanbul project, both of which promise large art collections (including one dedicated to female-focused works). People seeking nighttime entertainment will also soon find it in a world-famous cabaret brand's dinner show that will be its first to open outside of Paris, France. For those enamoured by the shopping possibilities, that will also be found at Tersane Istanbul in spades, with luxury outlets from brands such as Louis Vuitton and Hermès said to be set to open there in the coming years, along with Turkish brands such as Beymen, and globally sought-after retail experiences such as Niketown.

BOTTOM Fener-Balat seen from across the Golden Horn

IMAGES MEHDI33300/ADOBE STOCK; MUSTAFA SEVEN

In addition to Rixos Tersane Istanbul, there will also be another hotel from the Accor group. Visitors to the area will be able to wine and dine at stylish restaurants from internationally-renowned brands and celebrated chefs, while families will be able to indulge in the entertainment of brands such as The Land of Legends and Nickelodean Land. If that isn't enough, there's plenty more to do here: the charming neighbourhoods of Fener-Balat are a five-minute boat ride across the water.

One of the lesser-known parts of Istanbul (at least to the typical tourist), the historic neighbourhoods of Fener and Balat - known collectively as Fener-Balat - also have a long and storied history that's left them full of rich cultural appeal. These areas were once primarily home to the city's Greek Orthodox community and its Jewish residents (mostly those of Sephardic origin), with a number of Christians as well as Muslims also living there in droves through the years. Today, signs of its time as an inclusive cultural melting pot are still present, with a series of historically-significant sites to visit. In 1985, Balat was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, and its famous Church of St. Stephen of the Bulgars - also known as The Iron Church, or the Church of Sveti Stefan - continues to draw in hundreds of visitors, while still being in use by locally-based people. The Ahrida Synagogue, the Panagia Paramythia Church, Cantemir Palace, and the Church of Saint Mary of the Mongols, are all also popular stops on walking tours of Fener-Balat. Our guide told us that due to the Fener Greek Patriarchate, for followers of the Greek Orthodox faith, Fener holds the same significance that the Italy's Vatican City does for Catholics.

For tourists who hold modern callings such as social media in the highest regard, Fener-Balat holds another unique appeal: its incredibly-Instagrammable streets, lined with historic wooden homes painted in bright colours and unique architecture. Among them are quirky cafés filled with personality and charm, shops full of covetable antiques, and the highly-photographed Merdivenli Yokuş street and its now-iconic rainbow staircase.

As Fettah Tamince, chairman of the board of Rixos Hotels, put it upon the opening of Rixos Tersane Istanbul back in September last year: "[The 600-year-old Tersane Istanbul] reflects the most valuable elements of Istanbul's cultural and industrial heritage, yet it has been in disuse for many years. Thanks to the vision of our esteemed President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the efforts of our Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, we are restoring it as a modern living space for the citizens of Istanbul." With just the first phase of this project already making such a definitive splash, there is no doubt that its next few phases will continue to impress - and in doing so, not only breathe life back into this historic area, but cause ripples for an entirely new perspective on urban hospitality. **BT**

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HOTEL REVIEWS

Rixos Tersane Istanbul + The Manner, New York + The St. Regis New York

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Jun's, Downtown Dubai

Review

Putting business travel to the test

HOTEL REVIEW

Rixos Tersane Istanbul

Istanbul's latest swanky "it" spot - now Rixos's flagship property in the brand's home country - is more than just a hotel, it's a slice of history

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

What's it like?
Built upon a historic shipyard that had existed for six centuries, and was essentially gathering dust, this coastal hotel is the crowning jewel in a cherished new project that celebrates this part of Türkiye's rich past, while bringing it firmly into the future. The hotel's architecture was inspired by seafaring life: as you walk into the lobby, with its high ceilings and rows of rooms towering above you, it is immediately reminiscent of being on a large ship - but this isn't a loud or cramped cruise. Rather, it has the feel of an elegant yacht, full of warm tones and refined touches that epitomise classic quiet luxury. As you walk closer to the reception, you'll notice a panel of vintage-style keys decorating the wall behind it - just one aspect of the stunning art that decorates the hotel's walls and corners. Every detail has been carefully considered, and each piece meticulously chosen - from the custom-curated collection of artworks by local and international artists (which you can explore further through a catalogue and digital archive), to the books in its library.

Its location on the tip of the Golden Horn offers spectacular views of Istanbul's skyline. Whether you're sipping on Turkish tea alfresco, relaxing by the infinity pool, or catching a boat on one of the property's free tours of Fener-Balat or to the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, it instantly transports you to a time when travelling by sea was as common as it is by air - and in doing so, encouraging you to slow down and appreciate the joy of noticing the finer things in life.

Rooms
With plenty of warm wood and functional elements, the rooms are the perfect blend of classic and contemporary. By day, they're filled with natural sunlight, and by night, the comfortable beds (and pillow menu) help you get a great night's sleep. The bathrooms have lovely Etro products, and there's a good desk setup.

Facilities
There is a seemingly endless amount of things to do in and around the property, although somehow, each one feels intimate, like you've found a hidden gem. Tucked away behind a subtle door off its lobby is Gowden, a gorgeous cigar lounge, while wine bar Vinose is a treasure trove of hand-picked pours. Velena by the Sea, a restaurant and food market with an expansive terrace and cozy indoor seating, is an excellent pick for an international feast, while Josephine Istanbul is a dreamy spot for a date night, family gathering, or the kind of meal that lingers long into the night, whether you sit indoors or outdoors. Below the ground floor is a spa, and the hotel's sports club facilities include a state-of-the-art gym as well as a padel court. The hotel encourages you to explore both in and outside the hotel, with a number of tours and excursions for guests each week - but always at your own pace. **BT**

GOOD -TO- KNOW

There are 432 rooms, including 57 suites - some of which include a bathtub, sea views, and a balcony. The hotel is eco-certified and wheelchair-accessible.

VERDICT

A stunning new addition to Istanbul's hotel scene, worthy of being the flagship of this proudly Turkish brand.

BEST FOR

A relaxing stay that will show you a different side of Istanbul, that offers easy access to key tourist areas.

DON'T MISS

Sunday Brunch at Velena, where you can eat a delicious array of foods on the terrace overlooking the water, while also purchasing high-quality speciality items to take home.

PRICE
Internet rates for a weeknight stay in mid-June start from Dhs1,068

CONTACT
Camiikebir, Taşkızak Tersanesi Caddesi No:23/1, 34440 Beyoğlu/İstanbul, Türkiye; +90 212 377 58 00

IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
ALLYSON PORTEE

The Manner, New York

A fresh concept from the Hyatt-owned Standard International's Unbound Collection

What's it like?
The hotel prides itself on its very grown-up vibe. Its upscale design approach of bold colouring was envisioned by Amar Lalvani, Hyatt's President and Creative Director of Lifestyle. It's Milan-based residential architect Hannes Peer's first hotel project, created with Verena Haller, Global Head of Design & Creative Services at The Lifestyle Group for Hyatt. The intimate space stuns from the moment you walk in. The idea is for the hotel to feel like you're staying at the home of glamorous friend. There's something very Milan about its design, with wood panelling, marble flooring, heavy statues, dark tones, and large pieces of wall art.

Rooms
The rooms and hallways are turmeric-coloured wall overload with matching accents of emerald green, royal blue, and red. These bold colours clash, but in a good way, complemented by the Italian modernism furnishings found in the rooms. There are 97 rooms, including a Duplex Penthouse.

The 1 King Bed Corner Room is spacious at 280 sq ft. The yellow hue brightens up the room, while at the same time giving retro energy. With a mid-century modern feel, it takes you back to the late 1940s into the 1970s. The reimagined living room area feels like a restaurant booth with a marble table. The bathroom, with mosaic tiling on the floor, adds an Italian touch. Rooms are quiet and offer towering views of SoHo. TVs aren't included in the rooms, all for the purpose of encouraging guests to relax, connect a podcast to the speakers, have a conversation, or to read. This drives home the feel of staying at a friend's luxurious home.

Facilities
There are four dining options at the hotel. The Rooftop, open for the season since May 2025, is the place to sip coffee, have drinks with friends, and have a nightcap. The Apartment is strictly for hotel guests, who are welcome to wear their robe and relax. The menu is printed anew each morning, and includes the outdoor temperature plus a complimentary menu with a continental breakfast. Sloane's is the an ideal pre-dinner spot before heading to The Otter, which is also open daily for brunch and cocktail hour. It also has a raw bar. There is a gym, just not onsite: the hotel has partnered with Equinox SoHo to offer hotel guests complimentary access during their stay.

There are four event spaces. The Otter welcomes 130 guests with a menu by Chef Alex Stupak. It can also be set up in a classroom style for 80 people. The Rooftop and Sloane's also hold 80 each, with the former offering city skyline as the backdrop. The Duplex Penthouse, known for its party set-up and private terrace, can hold up to 40 people. **BT**

GOOD-TO-KNOW

Opened in September 2024, this adults-only hotel is located on the renowned tree-lined Thompson Street in New York's chic SoHo neigbourhood.

VERDICT

It combines the luxury of a hotel with the feel of a private residence and a member's club.

BEST FOR

Mid-century modern design fiends.

DON'T MISS

The Apartment for ultimate relaxation and deep conversation.

PRICE
Internet rates for a 1 King Bed Corner Room in early June start from US$1,024.

CONTACT
58 Thompson Street, New York, NY 10012, hyatt.com

IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
ALLYSON PORTEE

GOOD-TO-KNOW

Located on 5th Avenue, guests and visitors are a stone's throw from a wide variety of luxury shops, as well as the iconic sites of Rockefeller Center and Times Square.

The St. Regis New York

An iconic property in the famed city that's ready for another epic chapter

What's it like?
The St. Regis New York was founded by John Jacob Astor IV in 1904, an American business magnate and real estate developer whose family lived in the hotel. He was the richest passenger on the RMS Titanic ship that went down in 1912. His vision of having a technologically advanced and luxurious hotel has translated into every room having a telephone - something that carries on in the 40 St. Regis properties around the world.

The Beaux-Arts-style hotel underwent a multi-phase renovation that lasted three years, reaching its competition in 2025.

Rooms
Deluxe rooms with butler service include the complimentary pressing of two garments per stay, business services (for a fee), and an honour bar. This room type is sizeable at 41 sqm, with a living area, high ceilings, and the option for inter-connected access. In the bedroom, you'll find a glamorous chandelier. The bed typically comes in a king size, but two doubles are possible. The marbled bathrooms have a whirlpool tub and a Dyson hair dryer, and a full suite of luxury room amenities is available.

Facilities
Breakfast is served in La Maisonette, a brightly coloured restaurant with modernist artistic touches. Taking a nod from the 1910's, the space was the original breakfast room of the hotel. The King Cole Bar is well known and has been featured in many movies, from *The Devil Wears Prada* to *The First Wives Club*. With strong hints of early 20th century NYC, it's iconic. The bartender can whip up any signature cocktail or mocktail of your liking, but the bar is known for its selection of Bloody Mary's, wines, and cocktails. The Drawing Room, as it is known today, was once called Astor Court. The newly-redone space is filled with velvet couches and individual sleek chairs, it's the ideal place for a late afternoon meal or dinner.

There are 16 event spaces, ideal for hosting everything from weddings, meetings, seminars, or luncheons. Spaces include The Library, with masculine tones and wood-panelled walls; the Fontainebleau with a gilded-age-style design and crystal chandeliers; and the boardroom-like Mezzanine Conference Room. The hotel offers 3D tours online for those wanting a close view of the event spaces, and an on-site planner and Maître D' make sure every detail and touch is carried out for your function. Ther on-site state-of-the-art Athletic Club is open 24 hours, complete with Technogym ARTIS equipment, or you can opt for on-demand private training. The hotel also offers a private sabrage masterclass, which includes a bottle of Veuve Cliquot Yellow Label Champagne, one trail bottle of sparkling wine, and canapés for up to four guests. Reservations must be made two weeks in advance. **BT**

VERDICT

A quintessential New York City experience that's rich in history, offers real luxury, and a memorable stay, as it seamlessly bridges the old and new.

BEST FOR

The colourful vibe of La Maisonette.

DON'T MISS

The chance to try The Original Bloody Mary at the King Cole Bar, where the famed cocktail was invented.

PRICE
Internet rates for a mid-week one-night stay in June start from US$1,457.

CONTACT
Two East 55th Street, at Fifth Avenue,
New York, New York 10022,
marriott.com

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

Jun's, Downtown Dubai

Multi-award-winning fine dining in an unpretentious environment

What's it like?
This unique concept by renowned chef Kelvin Cheung - a Chinese-Canadian who was born in Canada, raised in Chicago, and is now based in Dubai - celebrates the idea of the "third culture kid", through exceptional food utilising flavours and techniques from around the world to create something entirely unique. Since it first opened in 2022, it has won a number of accolades, including a place in the MENA's 50 Best list for 2023, a Gault & Millau Toque in both 2023 and 2024, and recognition in the Michelin Guide for three years in a row: 2023, 2024, and since last month, 2025. Located in the heart of Downtown Dubai, it's upscale yet unstuffy, with wholesome fine food, and you'll want to return again and again.

Food and drink
The menu here is, in a word, superb. Everything from its starters to its mains and even the drinks menu reflects the chef's cosmopolitan background, through unexpected flavour combinations and a variety of exciting textures that come together in a moreish melting pot. A large part of the menu is vegetarian-, vegan-, dairy-, and gluten-free friendly, making it easy for everyone to find a worthy option regardless of their dietary restrictions. Standout items include the smokey and silky szechuan eggplant with hummus; the rainbow heirloom carrots with smoked labneh, soy honey butter, candied walnuts, and sourdough bread; delicate Hokkaido scallop served with house-made yuzu kosho, corn puree, and warm crispy rice; and a buttery poached lobster pani puri served with tamarind gel and achari. Fans of spicy food will love the crispy red hot chicken karaage and waffles (served with jalapeño butter), while the wagyu beef potstickers' hot and sour vinaigrette is good enough to be drunk as a soup. The mains see classics reimagined in the most inventive ways: a spicy dan dan spaghettini, delicate miso chilean sea bass with apple fennel slaw, and melt-in-your-mouth beef and short rib. Even the bread, served with hot honey chilli butter and fermented black garlic,, isn't ordinary.

Service
Friendly, efficient, and warm, the staff here are the type to make great recommendations not just because it's the most popular (or pricey) pick on the menu, but because they've taken the time to find out what you might enjoy. They want you to feel real joy trying their suggestion. They'll make you feel at home while you navigate which dishes to try first, and which you'll absolutely return for. **BT**

GOOD-TO-KNOW

Although the venue itself isn't the largest, it can comfortably host groups of 10, 20, or even 25, with custom-curated set menus and drinks packages

VERDICT

Food and drink that entices, surpises, and delights, that proves fine dining can feel warm. It's worthy of all the hype.

HOURS

Open from 12pm to 2am from Monday to Sunday.

CONTACT

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Blvd, Downtown Dubai; +971 4 457 6035; junsdubai.com

DRESS CODE

Smart casual.

HOT TIPS

The restaurant offers an 11-course tasting menu of chef Kelvin Cheung's most-loved dishes, which is available throughout the week for both lunch and dinner, for Dhs485 per person. There is a vegetarian and non-vegetarian version available, and both take you on a journey of flavours across the world. If you're driving, the restaurant has a complimentary valet service available.

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

A new way to lift the spirits

IHG HOTELS & RESORTS has announced plans to add the first property under its Kimpton brand in the UAE. Kimpton Dubai will be located along Business Bay Canal, and is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2026. The hotel will feature 280 rooms, three dining concepts, a rooftop swimming pool, a fitness centre, "curated retail outlets", and seven meeting spaces - including a ballroom. The Kimpton brand, which was purchased by IHG just over a decade ago, is known for its "human difference" - with the idea that at a Kimpton property, the people you meet and the human connections you make will change the way you stay. The brand aims to help lift people's spirits, not just put people to sleep, and aims to foster diversity and inclusivity, while encouraging guests to be their most authentic selves. **BT**

IMAGE **IHG HOTELS & RESORTS**

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